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O MOST DIVINE EMPEROR
NARRATIVE AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN ELEVENTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides the first collective revision of four nearly contemporary eleventh-century historical accounts: Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*, Michael Attaleiates' *History*, and John Skylitzes' *Synopsis* and *Continuation*. Recent studies have attempted to further contextualise Byzantine historical narratives in order to form a better understanding of the past and the way it was perceived by contemporaries. Of special concern to this thesis is the mishandling of key concepts such as religion, theocracy, authorial originality, and the purposes behind Byzantine history writing. This study analyses how these authors and their literary activity have been framed within misleading dichotomies between either religion and secular, autocratic and republican thought, or traditional writing and original innovation.

A narratological framework will be applied to the revision of the sources. Thus, the central chapters are devoted to the narratives' character focus, how the characters' morality is qualified in the sources, and the creative uses of narrative space and time to shape the message aimed at their respective intended audiences. In sum, this narratalogical revisionist appraisal of these accounts provides a new perspective on eleventh-century political thought in Byzantium.

To Ruth

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Abbreviations

BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BSl	*Byzantinoslavica*
Byz	*Byzantion*
ByzForsch	*Byzantinische Forschungen*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CSHB	*Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
JÖB	*Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*
MEG	*Medioevo Greco*
OBD	*The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*
REB	*Revue des études byzantines*
TBR	*The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*
VV	*Vizantijskij Vremennik*
ZRVI	*Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*

A Note on Transliteration and Citation

All spellings will stay as close to their original form as possible. Names will stay in their original Greek form, except in cases where a Latinate or Anglicised version is very familiar. Thus, Constantine, Michael and Basil will remain the same, but changes occur with *parakoimomenos*, Komnenos, and Alexios. Footnote numbers will be reset in each chapter. Likewise, I will use full citation every time a publication has not been introduced in a given chapter.

Given the centrality of Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*, Michael Attaleiates' *History* and John Skylitzes' *Synopsis* and *Continuation*, I will use abbreviations: *Chronographia*, *History*, *Synopsis*, and *Continuation*. Citations of the *Chrononographia* follow conventional references to the book, paragraph, and (occasionally) lines of the latest edition of the text (*Chronographia* 6.74.6-14). Citations of the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation* refer to their respective editions and the lines numerated in them (as in *Synopsis* 380.88-90 or *Continuation* 106.7-17). In the case of Attaleiates' *History*, referring to its *editio prima* has been conventional until recently. In the last twenty years, two editions of the text have emerged, together with an English translation that proposes a division of the text in chapters and paragraphs. Therefore, my citations will include a first reference to the *edition prima*, followed by a reference to the page and lines from the most recent edition (e.g. 48-49/39.8-13). Where possible, the English translation will appear in the main body of the text and the original Greek (from the edition cited in the bibliography) will appear in the relevant footnote.

Introduction

A politicised Byzantium

From its Medieval and early Modern origins onwards, the history of Byzantine studies has hardly ever parted ways with contemporary political agendas. From the 'Sun King' to Fernandez de Heredia, the Russian sovereigns, or the Ottoman court of Mehmet II, Byzantium has been repeatedly used as a lens to reflect on past and present politics.[1] In particular, the memory of the Byzantine past has served to produce narratives about the meaning of the Roman imperial legacy through the ages, and its relationship with ecclesiastical hierarchy. This is also the case for early modern English narratives about Byzantium. Edward Gibbon's famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* analysed the slow transition of the once-glorious Roman Empire into obscurity and decay.[2] In defining what failed in Byzantium, Gibbon obliquely tells us that he attributed success to modernity and secularism, and the avoidance of feebleness and superstition.[3] Other authors developed the image of Byzantium as an example of the excessive influence of secular power over the church. Before the term 'cesaropapism' became the conventional term for depicting such a situation, Jacob Burkhardt coined the term

[1] On the 'Byzance du Louvre' funded by Louis XIV, and its political agenda, see J-M. Spieser, 'Du Cange and Byzantium', in R. Cormack and E. Jeffreys (eds.). *Through the looking glass: Byzantium through British eyes. Papers from the twenty-ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, London, March 1995* (Aldershot 2000) 199-210; P. Lemerle, 'Montesquieu et Byzance', *Flambeau* 31 (1948) 386-394; on Fernandez de Heredia's translation of the Byzantine chronicle of Morea and John Zonaras' *Epitome*: J. Zonaras, *Libro de los emperadores (Versión aragonesa del* Compendio de historia universal*, patrocinada por Juan Fernández de Heredia)*, eds. A. Álvarez Rodríguez and F. Martín García (Zaragoza 2006) 15; a classic work on the reception of the Byzantine past by the Russian court: D. Obolensky, *Byzantium and the Slavs* (Crestwood, NY. 1994) esp. 85-87 and 167-204; on the Ottoman court's appropriation of the Byzantine past: C. Norton, 'Blurring the Boundaries: intellectual and cultural interactions between the eastern and western; Christian and Muslim worlds.' in A. Contadini and C. Norton (eds.), *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World* (London 2013) 3-21; G. Necipoğlu, 'Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople', *Muqarnas* 29 (2012) 1-81.

[2] E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (1776-1789) (Cambridge 2013); concerning the *Chronicle of Morea* and the debates on the origin of the text, and its relation with the later Aragonese translation: T. Shawcross, *The* Chronicle of Morea*: Historiography in Crusader Greece* (Oxford 2009), esp. 31-52.

[3] It is worth noting, for example, the manner in which Gibbon brought back the Roman identity to the 'Greek' Byzantines on the occasions when they were winning: G. Fowden, 'Gibbon on Islam', *English Historical Review* 131 (2016) 261-292, esp. 265, n. 10; also noted by A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA and London 2019) 13.

byzantinismus for that purpose.[4] In vastly different ways, Gibbon and Burkhardt used the Byzantine past in order to discuss what a 'healthy' relation between church and state should look like.

A significant proportion of twentieth-century Byzantine scholarship continued debating such terms, analysing the interaction of the Medieval Roman state with the early Christian Church.[5] Still, even when the debate strayed from church affairs, political ideology often remained at the centre of the picture, also as a way to connect with modern perspectives towards ideology. For instance, Georg Ostrogorsky's now-classic *History of the Byzantine State* emphasised middle Byzantine characters as belonging to a certain social class with specific habits and ways of approaching political affairs. It is my impression that Ostrogorsky could not avoid projecting contemporary socio-political tensions onto his perception of Byzantine class struggle. Thus, he populated his narrative of tenth and eleventh-century Byzantium with low-class bureaucrats, state loyalists, and good-looking, learned aristocrats who were ultimately unable to rule well, despite their abundance of culture and wealth.[6]

An even more recent example is Hélène Ahrweiler's *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantine*, published in 1975. Ahrweiler focuses on different power struggles, frequently held

[4] J. Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen* (Kettwig 1853). The debate over the church/state relations in Byzantium had a continuous attraction from Burckhard until nowadays, and has been deeply related with the topic of the Byzantine ideology of power relations.

[5] For further scholarly work on the reception of Byzantium in early Modern times, see the following as a recent example: P. Marziniak and D. Smythe (eds.), *The reception of Byzantium in European culture since 1500* (London 2015); G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge 2003) 282-312.

[6] For instance, the strongest defenders of the dying eleventh-century Byzantine bureaucratic state such as the eunuchs John Orphanotrophos or Nikephoritzes, Ostrogorsky argues, are low-born men who ascended into the administration ranks by their own merit. However, he depicted magnates and defenders of the 'civil aristocracy', such as Romanos III Argyros, as expectably handsome, full of vanity and moral decadence, and possessing some culture that ultimately revealed itself useless for dealing with state affairs. The military elites cared for the empire's military system, not because it convened to the whole community, but mostly because that was their social milieu, and thus the civil elites tried to reduce the wealth of the army. Characters such as Nikephoros Phokas or Alexios Komnenos are represented as exceptional inasmuch as they surpassed their respective class stereotypes: Nikephoros' appearance 'betrayed his aristocratic descent', leading an ascetic life in his appearance and his actions; Alexios surpassed his military horizon and learned about the state necessities, along with some diplomacy: G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*; trans. J. Hussey (Oxford 1968) esp. 285-286, 322-324, 327, 331, 344-349, 367 and 374-375.

between the emperor and the patriarch, on the basis of two key principles of Byzantine political ideology: hierarchical social order (τάξις) and the practical management of that order (οἰκονομία).[7] As Paul Magdalino noted in a recent article, Ahrweiler's book projects Byzantine history as a succession of cycles of expansion and retraction.[8] Unrealistic imperial expansive projects almost invariably lead to failure and further reductions of imperial territory. That approach to Byzantine politics, Magdalino argues, corresponds to Ahrweiler's own views of Modern Greek history, in particular her response to the almost-contemporary Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus.[9] Thus, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantine* also exemplifies both the importance of political history and ideology within the field of Byzantine studies, and the uses of Byzantium as an example to reflect on contemporary political affairs.

Despite all the effort from academics on this matter, the topic of Byzantine political ideology has been argued as acutely understudied and in need of revision, mostly as a result of the aforesaid problems in our modern readings of past ideologies.[10] Throughout this thesis I will analyse the way in which four eleventh-century Byzantine historical accounts – Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*, Michael Attaleiates' *History*, and John Skylitzes' *Synopsis* and *Continuation* – convey specific narratives about how their polity is being ruled and what the ideal ruling scenario would be.[11] In doing so, I will critically engage with current discourses on past and present societies, in particular those which frame discussions on Byzantine ideology around the poles of religion and science, societal progress and regression. I will first

[7] H. Ahrweiller, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantine* (Paris 1975) 132.

[8] P. Magdalino, 'Forty Years on: The Political Ideology of the Byzantine Empire', *BMGS* 40.1 (2016) 18.

[9] As Magdalino argues, Ahrweiller's views were supposedly influenced by Vakalopoulos' *The Origins of the Greek Nation* (New Brunswick, NJ. 1970); Magdalino, 'Forty years on', 23.

[10] A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in the New Rome* (Cambridge, MA 2015) xi:

> A formulaic definition of 'Byzantine political theory' has been constructed out of mostly modern concepts, projected onto the culture, and recycled since the 1930s. Scholars are content to recite this model as a general definition of the culture before they move on to study the particular aspects that interest them.

[11] By focusing on the three historical narratives, I will discuss modern readings on these accounts, which are often used to build wider arguments on how the Byzantines thought about politics overall: see pages 35-41.

pinpoint the presence of these discourses within the latest research on eleventh-century historians. Then, after incorporating narrative analysis of the four historical accounts, I will render traditional approaches towards the Byzantine past, at least partially, obsolete. The result of this will be a more nuanced approach to the multifaceted political ideology present in eleventh-century Byzantium, as exemplified in my three main accounts.

The seeds of discord: current conceptual debates on 'ideology'

As noted above, Byzantine political ideology is still open to debate today. Byzantine scholars such as John Haldon and Anthony Kaldellis argued that there is a need to clearly define what we mean by 'ideology' in our research.[12] Broadly speaking, 'ideology' has two meanings in modern English. Firstly, ideology has been used as a seemingly-derogatory qualifier for a given set of ideas, defining them as a 'false belief'. 'Ideology' has been linked with concepts such as 'propaganda', and may evoke stories from Nazism and the Cold War, together with the triumphant proclamation that the 'age of ideologies' is gone; now that most totalitarian regimes are out of the equation, and technology provides us quick access to information, people start to see the world as it *really* is.[13] In my research, I have discarded that approach to 'ideology', which *de facto* legitimises current inequalities.[14] The second way to define ideology merely categorises 'the way some people think', or what determines what information is important to

[12] Kaldellis, *TBR*, 1; J. Haldon, 'Res publica Byzantina? State formation and issues of identity in medieval east Rome', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40.1 (2016) 9-11.

[13] A brief summary on the different definitions of the word 'ideology' can be found in S. Maleševi, 'Ideology', in K. Dowding (ed.), *Encyclopedia of power* (Thousand Oaks, CA 2011) 334-339, esp. 334: 'Since Napoleon's time, the popular understanding of ideology has retained this pejorative meaning, remaining a synonym for an overly irrational attachment to abstract principles'; this approach can be connected with approaches to post-cold war times as a post-historical world: F. Fukuyama, *The end of History and the Last Man* (London 1992); also T. Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London 1991) esp. x: 'the 'end-of-ideology school was palpably a creation of the political right … theorists viewed all ideology as inherently closed, dogmatic and inflexible', and yet 'the abandonment of the notion of ideology belongs with a more pervasive political faltering by whole sections of the erstwhile revolutionary left'; see also S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London 1989).

[14] S. Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London and New York, NY 2017 [2008]) 17-22. An overreliance on such a notion of ideology tends to define the elites as an essentially alien group holding a substantially more accurate grasp of the world, if not an overall hold of reality. That is a commonplace in mass-media depictions of politics, which may please many among the ruling elites by naturalising a 'lions-eat-lambs' approach into political science: a study of the ideology of contemporary British elites can be found in O. Jones, *The Establishment, and How They Get Away With It* (London 2015).

a subject when producing discourses about the world and taking actions based on these discourses.[15] This will be the definition of 'ideology' for this thesis; something closer to the newer concept of 'belief' or 'value systems' or 'symbolic universes'.[16] Individuals, in their quest for understanding the world around them, necessarily seek categorising entities and establish relations of causality between them. When I approach a given individual's belief system, hereby 'ideology', I will encompass a wide range of beliefs, starting from their 'belief' that a hammer will rise from the table if a person grasps it and pulls it upwards, to the belief in Thor's magical hammer, which only rises when seized by its rightful owner.

Individual belief systems are heavily shaped by others, since humans construct their experiences in community.[17] Thus, we can discuss 'the Byzantine ideology', understanding the nuance intrinsic to such a term. We could similarly sharpen our research's scope by exploring the 'eleventh-century Byzantine court ideology', or even the political ideology of a given individual. Every qualifier will necessarily be an abstraction: not everyone in the eleventh-century Byzantine court thought the same way, and neither can we perfectly isolate an individual's lifetime of thoughts and beliefs as a coherent whole. The difference within the terms I will choose relies on the emphasis I will give to individual particularities over mainstream ways of thinking shared by a group. Michael Psellos can, at once, be quoted as a particular example of 'Byzantine court ideology', as was customary in the decades-old scholarship on his oeuvre; or just stand by himself, as contemporary researchers tend to present

[15] Maleševi, 'Ideology', 334-339; on discourses: M. Foucault, *Archéologie du savoir* (Paris 1969); *Surveiller et punir*, (Paris 1975).
[16] On the notion of 'symbolic universe', see J. Haldon, 'Social Élites, Wealth, and Power', in J. Haldon (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium* (Malden, MA and Oxford 2009)168; Haldon, 'Res Publica Byzantina?', 10-11; F. Bernard, 'The Ethics of Authorship: Some Tensions in the 11th Century', in A. Pizzone (ed.) *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2014) 59.
[17] P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power' (trans. L.J.D. Wacquant), *Sociological Theory* 7 (1989) 14-25.

him. They are two sides of the same coin.[18] Consequently, I will discuss Byzantine political ideology in this thesis from both an individual and collective perspective.

'Thinking better': Ideology, progress, and secularisation

Beyond the rejection of a Manichean opposition between 'false beliefs' and 'direct experience of reality', it is nevertheless customary, inside and outside academia, to establish hierarchies of some kind between ideologies. As individuals have access to information and time for considering and discussing their thoughts, it is generally expected that they will produce sharper conclusions about reality, somewhat narrowing the gap between reality and their abstractions of it. Children are expected to 'mature' and become adults, which is generally considered a mental improvement. Similarly, a current, pervasive meta-narrative about human social life envisions societies as reified units that either develop or decline as they progress.

Furthermore, the entire history of humankind has been frequently envisaged as a story that moves *forward,* towards some teleological of civilisation and progression, conversely ending yet advancing still with the modern day. The difference between modern societies and pre-industrial, agrarian empires is relatively small in this aspect. Millennia ago, political leaders and orators praised the capacity of their polities' logistic achievements, which allowed them to control extensive territories and sustain heavily-anthropised urban nuclei.[19] However,

[18] E. Said, *Orientalism* (London 1980 [1978]) 21 already noted the problem in the balance between the social and the individual in what concerned the reproduction of the orientalist discourse, noting that 'there is a reluctance to allow that political, institutional, and ideological constraints act in the same manner on the individual author'; such a reluctance enabled us to study past thinkers detached from their political context, 'these are common enough ways by which contemporary scholarship keeps itself pure', that is to say, free from accusations of being politicised and thus distinctively biased'; back on Byzantine studies, F. Bernard, 'The Ethics of Authorship: Some Tensions in the 11th Century', in A. Pizzone, (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2014) 59 discusses Psellos' individual ideology in relation to two different discourses extended among his peers: C. Holmes, 'Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Some Preliminary Inquiries', *DOP* 64 (2010) 55, recommends focussing less on personalities than in the behaviours and expectations conveyed in a given political culture, thus suggesting another way to deal with the barrier between the individual and the social.

[19] Wickham noted, for instance, the existence, within Medieval 'strong states' such as Byzantium, countered the threat of political disintegration by 'the generation of a political culture, a set of assumptions about legitimate action … which favour central rather than regional power': C. Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (2006 [2005]) 59; the Greek historian Polybius explained the rise of Rome based on their military success, but this derived from a superior political regime and the Roman elites pursuing the right

contemporary narratives of progress are heavily linked to the unprecedented changes of the industrial era, which first spread from the north-west European factories to other areas of the continent and North America, and further on to several other regions of the planet. Scientific discoveries skyrocketed due to industry and provided individuals and institutions with powerful tools and commodities. Across the globe, intellectuals and politicians proclaimed a self-evident necessity to undertake an individual and collective 'update' in order to progress, both in terms of technology and of cultural and social values – 'useless' traditions should be left behind. The urge was particularly felt in countries from the periphery of the so-called 'industrialised world', such as Spain and the Ottoman Empire.[20]

However, narratives on progress, while intuitively once crafted, reduce the complexity of historical moments drastically. That is precisely the reason why societies in the periphery of the industrialised world are compelled to adopt a number of often-contradicting elements from the industrialised culture. Simply put, the premise can be understood like this: if you dress, talk and behave as a European gentleman, something of his productivity and wealth might somehow stick to you too.[21] In practice, signalling what exactly caused the industrial 'leap forward',

morals in their actions: see, for instance, Polyb. VI.11.11-14.12.; when the Western half of the Empire collapsed, the different explanations on the fall rarely traced a neat division between military tactics and moral principles: whatever that made Rome powerful, it was now held by the barbarians: August. *De ciu. D.* 1.1.; see also S. Castellanos, *En el final de Roma (ca. 455-480). La solución intelectual* (Madrid 2013) 275-277.

[20] Figures of all kinds, such as Mariano Jose de Larra (1809-1837) or Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) voiced the need for reformation, which also impacted in wider cultural trends, such as the literary Generación del 98, and political projects like the Ottoman Tanzimat: C.V. Findley, 'The Tanzimat' and A. Mango, 'Atatürk' in R. Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 4 (Cambridge 2008) 9-37 and 147-172 respectively, esp. 159-169; C. Serrano, 'Conciencia de la crisis, consciencias en crisis', in J. Pan-Montojo (ed.), *Más se perdió en Cuba: España, 1898 y la crisis de fin de siglo* (Madrid 1998) 335-403; For a central-European thinker such as Karl Marx, Spain and Turkey shared both an Asiatic-like 'despotic' form of government and 'incomprehension' from northern-European onlookers: K. Marx, 'Revolutionary Spain', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 13 (New York 1980) 396; see also 'The Details of the Insurrection at Madrid – The Austro-Prussian Summons – The New Austrian Loan – Wallachia' in the same publication, 285; see also M. Sacristán and R. Llorente, *Marxism of Manuel Sacristán: From Communism to the New Social Movements* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2014) 141-153.

[21] That might also be the reason why Byzantine scholars have praised the Byzantines as precursors of some modern European literary and authorial traits, and not directly linked them with technological advances, or even for 'saving Europe' and helping the West to become whatever it is today. It is worth noting how the title of J. Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London 2007) changed in the Spanish translation to *Bizancio: el imperio que hizo possible la Europa moderna* ('Byzantium: the empire that made Modern Europe possible';. L. Brownworth, *Lost to the West: the Forgotten Byzantine Empire that Rescued Western Civilisation* (New York, NY 2009); a nearly-contemporary Russian documentary, narrated by Vladimir Putin's father

though traditionally ascribed to 'Western' values or institutions, is a matter of debate even today.[22] Even further: the notion of what constitutes desirable progress is also unclear and, particularly, subjective. As Chris Wickham put forward, would a Medieval peasant have preferred to live in a comparatively less prosperous but more autonomous farm from the British high Middle Ages, or live under 'the security most powerful rulers could give them' in more complex polities?[23] This, of course, has no clear answer. Narratives of progress can and should be questioned, since they deeply affect our view of present and past societies.

This discussion affects this thesis as progressive narratives can often be found lying at the bedrock of contemporary academic discourses on premodern history. The role of Ancient

confessor, archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov, shares Brownworth's narrative on blaming the Westerners, among others, for contributing to the fall of the otherwise civilised and virtuous Byzantium, though the Russian counterpart summarises in advising fellow Russians against modern Western policies and cultural trends: Shevkunov, T. (dir.), *Гибель Империи: Византийский урок* (2008); Shekunov's documentary has been analysed in A. Ivanov, 'The Second Rome as Seen by the Third: Russian Debates on 'The Byzantine Legacy', in P. Marciniak and D. Smythe (eds.), *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500* (Farnham 2014) 55-80; concerning Psellos, in particular, Euthymia Pietsch underlined his pioneering defence of a strong authorial voice as if that was something worthy by itself, as I discuss in page 56; D. Walter, *Michael Psellos. Christliche Philosophie in Byzanz* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2018), esp. 182 underlines, as one of his key conclusions, the consistency of Psellos' philosophy, perhaps aiming to associate Psellos' thoughts to mainstream philosophers, who are usually learnt as a closed system of thought.

[22] A classic work here is M. Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Tübingen 1920); concerning scholarly works published after the end of World War II, as Robert Marks noted, scholarship looked at environmental, technological, political-military, or demographic factors to explain the 'European miracle': D. S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge 1969); and *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York, NY 1998); L. White, *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (Berkeley, CA 1978); P. O'Brien, 'European Economic Development: the Contribution of the Periphery', *Economic History Review* 35 (1982) 1-18; G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West 1500-1800* (Cambridge 1988); A. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (Cambridge 1997); newer, more sceptical approaches on the matter can be found in R. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham 2007); see also I. Morris, *Why the West Rules – for Now: The Patterns of History and What they Reveal about the Future* (London 2010).

[23] C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400-1000* (London 2009) 559; Chris Wickham's monograph constituted a reply to Ward-Perkins' oeuvre and sought for a middle ground between the partisans for disaster and those that defended continuity in page 9; he criticised 'the grand narrative of Modernity' in pages 5 and 6; as well as teleological arguments on the past in the pages 11 and 552 and 553; Following Wickham's claims on what Late Antique peasants would prefer, scholars such as Silvia Federici underline the increasing confinement of western European elite women to subaltern roles from the late Middle Ages onwards: S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY 2004); Federici acknowledged the contribution of earlier works to 'a reinterpretation of the history of capitalism and class struggle from a feminist viewpoint', not recognising patriarchy as a remnant of feudalism but as an inherent condition of capital relationships: M. Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol 1971); S. James, *Sex, Race, and Class* (Bristol 1975).

Greece and Rome has been central on this matter. Western intellectuals, persuaded by these industrial achievements, refurbished existing early Modern narratives to make Greece and Rome the pre-industrial precedent of their own civilisation. Once again, the praise of ancient Greece and Rome did not only concern technology. Parallels were traced between the Ancient and Modern morality and social order, while hiding the differences under the carpet. Western elites claimed to be emulating senators and intellectuals of the past, perhaps obscuring more inconvenient associations with orgies and slave ownership.[24]

Still, modern narratives on the end of the Ancient world oppose a science-oriented Antiquity and instead promote the arrival of a more superstitious medieval era.[25] Similarly, the Byzantine period is commonly defined by that arrival of the intellectual 'dark age'. The very concept of Byzantium easily leads to narratives about a thousand-year spiral of 'decline', which

[24] On modern receptions of the Ancient past by modern elites: E.M. Wood, *Peasant, Citizen, and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London and New York, NY 1988); C. Martínez Maza, *El espejo griego: Atenas, Esparta y las ligas griegas en la América del período constituyente (1786-1789)* (Barcelona 2013), focuses on the reception of Classical Greek history by the late eighteenth century US elites; also C. Martínez Maza, 'Luces y sombras del principado de Augusto en EE.UU. (1776-1860)', *Revista de Historiografía* 27 (2017) 83-105 discusses the ambiguous reception of the figure of Augustus by the very same elites, admiring the contemporary literature but actively overlooking the fact that the Roman republic had become an empire; C. Martínez Maza, 'El esclavismo antiguo en los Estados Unidos del periodo "antebellum" (1780-1860)', *Gerión* 34 (2016) 383-398 on the use of Classics for legitimising slave ownership before the United States Civil War; J. Zumbrunnen, '"Courage in the Face of Reality": Nietzsche's Admiration for Thucydides', *Polity* 35.2 (2003) 237-263 on Nietzsche's attributing Thucydides 'courage in the face of reality', which allows him to retain 'control over things': F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York, NY 1990 [1889]) 118; K. Harloe and N. Morley (eds.): *Thucydides and the Modern World. Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence from the Renaissance to the Present* (Cambridge 2012); George Marshall, US Secretary of State during Truman's presidency, and famous for his participation in the European Recovery Program or 'Marshall Plan', commented on the post-war scenario that 'I doubt seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep conviction regarding certain of the basic issues today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian War and the fall of Athens': R.C. Nation, 'Thucydides and Contemporary Strategy', *USAWC Guide to National Security Issues, Vol. I: Theory of War and Strategy* (Carlisle 2008) 129.

[25] The early Modern legacy for this narrative is often personified, in English-speaking academia, around the figure of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*; also C. Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World* (Boston, MA and New York, NY 2018); from a popular history scope, Alejandro Amenabar's 2009 film Agora presents the rise of Christianity as a victory of dogma over the solid-based research and the life of the philosopher and astronomer Hypatia of Alexandria. She might well be the last Eratosthenes, the film seemingly suggests, until Renaissance scientists such as Johannes Kepler or Galileo Galilei – referred to at the end of the film – resume Hypatia's work: Amenábar, A. (dir.), *Agora* (2009).

combine evidence of technological regression with all kinds of moral condemnation towards the Byzantines.[26]

Instead of critically analysing the ideological apparatus that idealises Antiquity, some Byzantine scholars have focused on making their object of study a credible heir of Antiquity – not all was lost after Hypatia.[27] Besides the well-known institutional continuity with the Ancient Roman government, many scholars emphasise Byzantine 'scientific' developments, proposing new candidates for the Western pantheon of progress. Scholars such as Inmaculada Pérez Martín present the Byzantine reception of Ptolemy and the works of Maximos Planoudes as evidence of Byzantine geographic achievements.[28] We can find similar attempts to vindicate Byzantium's position as relatively 'modern' or advanced in matters such as economic thought (liberal, profit-focused instead of dogmatic or utopian) or in their 'scientific' approach to the natural world.[29] These attempts do not help in critically engaging with the traditional ideological apparatus that revolves around Antiquity. Therefore, Byzantine studies remain under permanent risk of being labelled as a less important field than Classical or Renaissance studies from the same traditional grounds.

Ongoing discourses of progress have also affected the way we perceive Byzantine ethics, politics, and religion. Even though the field of Byzantine studies has often included approaches

[26] Modern narratives attempted to subvert this image in different ways: J. Herrin, *The Surprising Life*; A. Cameron, *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton, NJ 2014).
[27] Kaldellis, *TBR*, x traces modern views on Byzantium to the interests of European 'political and religious institutions that had a stake in the Roman legacy'.
[28] I. Pérez Martín, 'La Geografía erudita de Constantinopla', in M. Cortés Arrese (ed.), *Elogio de Constantinopla* (Madrid 2004) 51-83.
[29] A. Laiou, 'Economic Thought and Ideology', in A. Laiou, (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh Through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC 2002) 1123-1144, esp. 1124, 1128, 1130, and 1144; G. Katsiampoura, 'Transmutation of matter in Byzantium: The case of Michael Psellos, the Alchemist', *Science and Education* 17 (2008) esp. 664-665 explains that, although western intellectuals were the ones that finally managed to approach the physical world the right way, eleventh-century Byzantine intellectuals, led by Psellos, managed to reopen debates on the matter, which had been forgotten for centuries as a result of their perilous association with paganism.

that perceive Medieval thinkers as essentially more religiously-minded (an 'age of saints')[30] and accepting of autocratic forms of government, new lines of thought have strongly protested against these views – and in doing so, they have often ended up following discourses on progress that were very similar to those that condemned the Middle Ages to the labels of sainthood and superstition. Instead of questioning the role of religious belief in different societies, Byzantium was relocated within mainstream 'secularisation theses'. Following the research of Jorge Moniz which defined this concept, the 'secularisation theses' broadly argues that the structural properties of modernisation (depending on the approach adopted, this could include rationalisation, functional differentiation, or social ownership) would pose problems to 'traditional religion', ultimately reducing or even extinguishing its social relevance. Viewed from this approach, religion will fade as technology develops and people, who have access to more information, will do what is best for them.[31]

As will be shown throughout this thesis, reliance on different secularisation theses in modern readings of Byzantine sources has led to an increasingly frequent identification of the otherwise multi-faceted Byzantine religious experience as likened to concepts of 'theology' or 'dogma': both concepts which loosely connect to the elites and their interests, instead of daily life and practical problems of the Byzantines.[32] However, Byzantine intellectual stances on

[30] See note 32 below for the term 'age of saints'; see also H.-I. Marrou, *L'Église de l'Antiquité tardive, 304–603* (Paris 1963) 247–260, esp. 247.

[31] J.B. Moniz, 'As camadas internas da secularização: proposta de sistematização de um conceito essencialmente contestado', *Sociologia: Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* 34 (2017) 73-92, esp. 81-83; J. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge 2003).

[32] A display of different views on the matter can be found in P. Booth, M. Dal Santo, and P. Sarris, *An Age of Saints?: Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2011): inside this volume, M. Dal Santo, 'The God-Protected Empire? Scepticism towards the Cult of Saints in Early Byzantium', in Booth, Dal Santo, and Harris, *An Age of Saints?*, 129-149, esp. 145 adopted a relatively secularist approach when presented late antique scepticism towards saints as evidence of 'the survival of a rationalist tradition capable of questioning the manipulation of Christian symbols and its cult objects by the imperial gout of political ends'; note also Dal Santo's remarks on page 149: 'the empire's fiscally-oppressed inhabitants remained material beings with priorities other than religious and symbolic', alienated the material grounds of religious and symbolic practices; Peter Turner, however, cites Dagron in order to show how disbelief was often focused on not trusting the veracity of specific miracles and episodes, while outright atheism was 'almost inconceivable': P. Turner, 'Methodology, Authority and Spontaneity: Sources of Spiritual Truthfulness in Late Antique Texts and Life', in Booth, Dal Santo, and Harris, *An Age of Saints?*, 11-35, esp. 19; see also G. Dagron, 'L'ombre d'un doute: l'hagiographie en question VIe –XIe siècle', *DOP* 46 (1992) 59-68, esp. 59.

Christianity, omens, prophecies, or the supreme earthly authority of the ruler and his (or, rarely, her) court should be approached as something other than a group of false beliefs that will eventually fade away. They are neither the product of a naïve 'age of saints', nor the mere result of a unidirectional relation of exploitation by the intellectual elites of the rest of the population. What is often defined as 'religious practices' or 'beliefs' can contribute, as part of ever-developing belief systems, to a satisfactory understanding of the surrounding phenomena and, in turn, create responses to this.[33]

As long as Byzantine scholars produce research embedded in progress discourses, allocating Byzantine ideology and religious experience at the periphery of more desirable societal and ideological models, we will only reproduce very particular misrepresentations of the Byzantine social phenomena. Therefore, my thesis approaches both the ideology conveyed in the primary source material, and also the modern discourses on these sources. By using a narratological framework in my analysis of my four main historical accounts, I will analyse how the individuals represented there are characterised. Following an initial analysis aimed at separating the narratives' protagonists from characters that play a secondary role, I will focus my attention on the different narrative resources that narrators used to characterise their protagonists. The role of narrative space and time in character depiction, a topic that has received insufficient scholarly attention in the field of Byzantine studies so far, will receive special attention in the two final chapters.. Overall, I will provide fresh readings of these

[33] My approach is, in some aspects, close to B. Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Durham, NC 2010) 101-102; Bruno Latour approaches the utility of medieval religion within a multi-field experience framework. Religious experience would play a key role in medieval communities as a 'manner of speech' that, instead of corresponding to a specific state of affairs, corresponds to 'the quality of the interaction they generate in the way they are uttered'; Recently, John Arnold criticised Latour for his tendency to reify a characteristic medieval approach to religion, both consistent and different from the modern status quo. Arnold then underlines the coexistence of scepticism together with different forms of belief in medieval societies: J. Arnold 'Believing in Medieval Belief: Gibbon, Latour and what we do with Religion' (Cambridge 2018) [inaugural lecture] https://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2674080 (Last time visited 19 July 2019), esp. minutes 24 to 27; However, I would recommend re-examining Latour's argument on the different types of language, not as part of a now-lost medieval religious experience, but as something similar to ongoing processes. Modern mainstream practices and predicaments still can potentially be considered as religious in several ways: S. Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA 2009) 34.

sources, attempting to make their own idiosyncrasy stand with greater autonomy from modern notions on progress and religion. In doing so, my thesis will effectively incorporate new evidence into a more nuanced history of ideology.

1. Power and ideology in Byzantine historiography: the state of the field

1.1. The 'grand narrative' of the Byzantine eleventh century

Historians, in their endeavour to explain change through time, have come up with different explanatory models that make some sense out of vast complexity and a wide range of sources. Eleventh-century Byzantium, the period chosen for this thesis, is not an exception. In fact, when singled out from the main corpus of Byzantine history, the eleventh century has become a key piece in several 'grand narratives' in the past and present, both inside and outside of the 'ivory tower'.[1] The period begins with the ever-glorious reign of Basil II, the legendary 'Bulgar-slayer', a leader regarded as prototypical for different causes through time and space.[2] Already in the mid-eleventh century, the first composition of Psellos' *Chronographia* depicts key political characters praising Basil's rule just a few decades after his death.[3] Mostly as a result of the sources' good press, Basil's rule has been set up as a model of the 'golden age' of the middle Byzantine period, just as much as it has served as a dramatic counterbalance to the following political crisis.[4] Partially as a result of the information conveyed in the mainstream

[1] M.D. Lauxtermann, 'Introduction', in M.D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow (eds.), *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017) xv noted the variety of existing chronological frameworks for the Byzantine eleventh-century; my research will focus on the period AD 1025-1081.

[2] P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (Cambridge 2003), esp. 66-80 noted the sharp differences existing in the different approaches to Basil's reign, from the eleventh-century receptions to Basil as an ideal emperor, to the later emphasis on his war against the Bulgarians; for a detailed study on the 'historical' Basil II and the subjectivity of the main historical accounts focused on his reign, see C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford 2005).

[3] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 5.22, 6.8, 6.63, 7.52, and 7.76.

[4] Gibbon praises the military achievements of the Macedonian dynasty overall, while conceding some merits to Basil's capacities in the battlefield: E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (1776-1789) (Cambridge 2013) esp. 56-57: 'when the Eastern world was convulsed and broken, the Greeks were roused from their lethargy by the hopes of conquest and revenge. The Byzantine empire, since the accession of the Basilian race, had reposed in peace and dignity'; also 136-137 n. 23 for Gibbon's portrait of Basil and his rival Samuel of Bulgaria as 'men of iron, brave, cruel, and scrupulous'; C. Foord, *The Byzantine Empire: the Rearguard of European Civilisation* (London 1911) 295-296: '[Basil II] left the Empire secure on every hand, supreme from the head of the Adriatic to the Caucasus …. there was never to be again a warrior-statesman like Basil II'; N.H. Baynes, *The Byzantine Empire* (London 1925) 55: 'with the death of Basil II Rome's greatness declined'; G.

historical narratives of the period, and normally contrasted with other kinds of evidence such as the inflation of the Byzantine *nomismata*, the decades following Basil's death are often painted as a portrait of decline.[5] The final stop in the nightmarish succession of inner rebellions and military failures is the battle of Manzikert (AD 1071) and the inglorious end of the emperor Romanos IV – captured by the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslan, released, and then blinded by his fellow Romans. Anatolia, for centuries the heartland of the empire, was now open for the Seljuk Turkish raids for conquest and occupation.[6] Meanwhile, in the west, the former Norman mercenaries put centuries of Byzantine presence in Italy to an end. Further Norman campaigning across the Adriatic followed, pursuing the conquest of the remaining portions of the empire – perhaps even aiming at Constantinople itself.

Fortunately for the Byzantines (again, according to the grand narrative), one emperor managed to revert the situation: Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), whose reign has often been regarded positively, particularly due to the tone of the main source, Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*.[7]

Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*; trans. J. Hussey (Oxford 1968), 210 and 298 named the period 843-1025 as 'the Golden Age of the Byzantine empire' and, within this period, he described Basil's reign as 'the apogee of Byzantine power'; R. Jenkins, *Byzantium: the Imperial Centuries, AD 610-1071* (London 1966) 329: 'of all the emperors of Byzantium, Basil II, in his own person, came nearest to the imperial ideal of boundless power and boundless providence. He seemed to have been sent by Heaven to show that, in a set of highly exceptional circumstances, it was humanly possible to put the age-old theory in practice'; M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1205-1204* (London and New York, NY 1997 [1985]), esp. 24: '[Basil] came to symbolize the imperial grandeur that was slipping away [after his death]'.

[5] A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453*, vol. 1 (Madison, WI 1952) 351, marked the death of Basil II as the beginning of 'the time of troubles'; Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 333 defined the decades following the rule of Basil as 'an anti-climax' and a story 'of steady and accelerating political decline'; C. Foord, *The Byzantine Empire: the Rearguard of European Civilisation* (London 1911), esp. chapters 15 ('the age of women') and 16 ('the coming of the Turks'), 299-330; 316 'the disorderly elements which had been sternly suppressed by Basil II, and hold in check by the ill-defined but powerful influence of the daughters of Constantine IX [VIII], broke loose on the death of Theodora'.

[6] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 240 on the battle of Manzikert and the pillage of the Byzantine camp: 'The Byzantine writers deplore the loss of an inestimable pearl: they forget to mention that, in this fatal day, the Asiatic provinces of Rome were irretrievably sacrificed'; pioneering research pointed out, as early as in the decade of the 1970s, that the most profitable land in Anatolia was located in the coastland, and thus emphasise even more the recovery under the Komnenoi, as they took the best areas back from the Seljuq principalities: M. Hendy, 'Byzantium, 1081-1204: An Economic Reappraisal', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 20 (1970) 31-52, esp. 33-34.

[7] Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.11 compares the powerlessness of the Roman empire at the time of Alexios' arrival (circumscribed to the Bosporus and Adrianople) with the restoration achieved during the emperor's lifetime; such expression mirrors an earlier discourse, critical with Alexios, by the patriarch John the Oxite dated in 1090-1091, implying that the empire had been reduced to Constantinople: P. Gautier, 'Diatribes de Jean l'Oxite contre Alexis 1er Comnène, *REB* 28 (1970) 35; see also A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453*, vol. 2 (Madison, 1958 [1928]) 375: 'Owing to his energetic and skilful rule, Alexius I (1081-1118) secured the Empire from serious external dangers which sometimes threatened the very existence of the state'; Foord, *The Byzantine*

Alexios managed to expel the Norman forces from the Balkans, even using the crusade to his advantage and retaking the crucial Anatolian coastline. He also successfully outlived coups and rebellions and passed the crown to his own son. This marked the beginning of the 'century of the Komnenoi', often presented as a new era of political prowess and splendour.[8]

This narrative has been repeated for decades, including variations on the moral guilt of specific rulers, or in tracing the point of no return and specific causes for the loss of Anatolia.[9] Thus, different approaches towards eleventh-century Byzantium have been subordinated to this autonomous narrative, which often plays a pivotal point in the bigger narrative of Byzantium, sometimes even offering further proof of the empire's structural decline. Different approaches converge in pointing out that Byzantium, after the eleventh century, had changed for good: a new reality will present it in competition with prospering neighbouring powers that pose a threat to the shrunken empire.[10]

1.2. Marxist approaches: the struggle towards feudalism

While the historical sources and some modern narratives have tended to link both prosperity and decline to concrete decisions taken by emperors, military leaders, or people situated in privileged positions of power, some historians have sought to escape from that end,

Empire, esp. 331-333 concerning the desperate situation of the empire by 1081, comparable to that in 717; portrays a more nuanced Alexios, a flawed man who left an incomplete legacy to his descendants, and yet 'it must be remembered that the times were against him, and that in spite of that he succeeded in preserving the Empire, and in strengthening it so that it endured for another century'.

[8] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 287-288 approaches the reign of Alexios and his successors with ambivalence, as their military success was greatly indebted of the Crusade; in 322 Gibbon compares Alexios with 'the jackal, who is said to follow the steps, and to devour the leavings, of the lion [the Crusade]'; in 324 he concludes: that 'instead of trembling for their capital, the Comnenian princes waged an offensive war against the Turks, and the first crusade prevented the fall of the declining empire'; Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, esp. 375: 'the first three Comneni succeeded in keeping the throne for a century and transferring it from father to son'; G. Walter, *La vie quotidienne a Byzance au siècle des Comnènes (1081-1180)* (Paris 1966) 5-6 depicted an empire that, by 1071, was 'au bord de l'abîme', until Alexios 'réussit à redresser la situation de l'Empire' and his descendants 'poursuivrent, tenaces, sa tâche'.

[9] See, for instance, Frankopan, P., 'Kinship and the distribution of power in Komnenian Byzantium', *English Historical Review* 122 (2007) 1-34; and also P. Frankopan, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (London 2012) esp. 42-70, both revaluating the conventional image of Alexios Komnenos' reign.

[10] Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, esp. 361-374.

emphasising instead the impact of broader social changes. Had this thesis been written a couple of decades ago, it would have probably begun by presenting the conflict between civil and military elites, then one of the mainstream narratives for explaining middle Byzantine politics.[11] Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a growing number of Byzantine scholars adopted 'Marxist' or 'historical materialist' approaches to history, as an appropriate theoretical canvas for framing the development of Byzantine institutions into a comparative, universal framework. One of the key questions commonly asked by Marxist interpreters was whether the empire essentially fit into the same category of other ancient polities, where an owner class benefitted from the hard work of slaves, or whether the empire could be ranked among other medieval polities as a new feudal model, where slave workforce constituted a minority, but the relations of exploitation were based on feudal lords exerting their dominion over their subjects. The ancient and feudal paradigms constituted subsequent relations of production in social progress.[12]

The pioneering work of Georg Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, opened the path to explore the Byzantine transition from the ancient model to feudalism. It also set the eleventh century as central to this process. Ostrogorsky had already studied the existence of powerful 'magnates' or 'aristocrats' accumulating land across the empire during the tenth-century. Small landowners lost their lands, or even ceded them voluntarily in exchange for

[11] S. Vryonis, 'Byzantine Imperial Authority: Theory and Practice in the Eleventh Century', in G. Makdisi, D. Sourdel, and J. Sourdel-Thomine (eds.) *La notion d'autorité au Moyen âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris 1982) 141-161, esp. 143; P. Magdalino, 'Byzantine Snobbery', in M. Angold (ed.), *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries* (Oxford 1984) 58-78; also 'Honour among Rhomaioi: the Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos', *BMGS* 13 (1989) 183-218; A.P. Kazhdan and S. Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia bizantina : dal principio dell'XI alla fine del XII secolo* (Palermo 1997); an alternative approach was Beck's, who divided the Byzantine elites in four groups instead of two: H.G. Beck, 'Konstantinopel. Zur Sozialgeschichte einer frühmittelalterlichen Hauptstadt', *BZ* 58 (1965) 11-45; also H.G. Beck, *Byzantinisches Gefolgschaftswesen* (Munich 1965).

[12] J. Haldon ''Jargon' vs. 'the Facts'? Byzantine History-Writing and Contemporary Debates', *BMGS* 9 (1985) 95-132; a critical analysis on the approach to the socio-economics of the Athenian democracy as a 'slave mode of production' can be found in E.M. Wood, *Peasant, Citizen, and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London and New York, NY 1988) 36-41.

protection, and so the state began to lose vital tax income and manpower. While Ostrogorsky applauded tenth-century rulers, and particularly Basil II, for trying to keep the aristocrats at bay, eleventh-century politics saw the end of such an endeavour. Ostrogorsky grouped the emperors that followed Basil II in two elite factions: civil magnates from the capital and military elites from the provinces – the task of defending the state against the magnates was the lonely job of outcast characters who ascended through the administration, such as the eunuchs John Orphanotrophos or Nikephoritzes. The accumulation of wealth by these magnates and competition between the two factions, according to Ostrogorsky, proved to be fatal for the empire, as civil emperors sought to weaken a main source of power for their provincial rivals, namely the army. Following this model, the empire contracted as a result of these inner social conflicts, and the new stage of Byzantine stability and expansion would be grounded on an essentially feudal basis – the magnates had already won. The post-Herakleian, centralised and bureaucratic Byzantium had ceased to exist by the time that Alexios Komnenos took power in 1081.[13]

In Ostrogorsky's view, the political ideology of traditional rulers depended primarily on their class background. In that respect, the 'civil' and 'military' elites rose from different places and had different habits.[14] Scholars solidly connected different systems of belief to the different aristocratic sectors within Byzantine society, to the point that Alexander Kazhdan remarked with surprise how Michael Attaleiates, a 'town-dweller', ended up singing 'the praises of

[13] Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 272-276 on the policies of Romanos Lekapenos against the magnates, 280-281 on Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, 285-286 on the pro-aristocratic policies of Nikephoros Phokas, 294-295 on John Tzimiskes' renewed defence of the state, 305-307 on Basil's harsh anti-aristocratic policy, a summary of the eleventh-century rise of the aristocracy in 320-321, 323, 327-329, 342 and 345; the display of some anti-aristocratic policies by John Orphanotrophos in 324, and the latter political attempts to restore control by Nikephoritzes in 347; finally, 367 and 371 on the consolidation of feudalism under Alexios Komnenos; Ostrogorsky's tendency to explain the inner workings of the eleventh-century Byzantium as the fight between the state and the powerful landowners, however, precedes him, as can be noted in earlier works such as Foord, *The Byzantine Empire*, esp. 316-317; Baynes, *The Byzantine Empire*, 55: 'the internal history of the Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is thus dominated by the struggle between the capital and the provincial magnates'.

[14] Ostrogorsky's tendency to explain the inner workings of the eleventh-century Byzantium as the fight between the state and the powerful landowners, however, precedes him, as can be noted in earlier works such as Foord, *The Byzantine Empire*, esp. 316-317.

nobility, valour and generosity' from the 'feudal lords'.[15] The infusion of the provincial aristocracy into the governing institutions of the empire at the end of the century, together with the settlement of Latin principalities in the east, led (according to Ostrogorsky) to the adoption of western European feudal practices, such as the relationship of vassalage, into the core of Byzantine political culture.[16]

The prominence of the Marxist explicative model, as summarised above, lost some ground towards the end of the century. Some of its aspects were particularly criticised, such as the teleological and Eurocentric notion that, eventually, Byzantium would necessarily 'update' itself to the feudal era, an idealised stage that, *strictu senso*, overrepresented practices and social divisions characterising a small corner of northern Europe over a relatively small period of time.[17] The multi-faceted Marxist tradition presented a universal framework for analysing past and present societies. Marxists and structuralist approaches sought to trace back individual ideologies to their surrounding material context. Furthermore, in analysing ideology as a product of the surrounding material context, the Marxist legacy contributed to raised awareness

[15] A. Kazhdan, 'The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', in A. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984) 86; also A.A. Demosthenous, *Ιδεολογία και φαντασία στο Βυζάντιο: μελέτες ανθρωπολογίας και ιστορίας των νοοτροπίων μέσα από τη βυζαντινή γραμματεία* (Nicosia 2006) 54-57 linked different middle Byzantine approaches to beauty and aesthetics, including Psellos' own thoughts on the matter, to the arrival of the provincial elites and their values to the court.

[16] Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 375: 'for the first time onwards the influence of the West began to make itself felt in Byzantium in many ways, both culturally and politically'; on the relationship of vassalage in Byzantium, N. Svornos, 'Le serment de fidélité à l'empereur byzantine et sa signification constitutionelle', *REB* 9 (1951) 106-142, esp. 106; J. Ferluga, 'La ligesse dans l'Empire byzantin', *ZRVI* 7 (1961) 97-123.

[17] Ostrogorsky already criticised the studies that argued that feudalism as a political idea appeared in Byzantium as a result of western influence: Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 375; on the opposite side; M.J. Sjuzjumov, 'К вопросу об особенностях генезиса и развития феодализма в Византии', *Византийский временник* 42 (1960) 3-16; Haldon, ''Jargon' vs. 'the Facts'', 105-106, concerning a tendency within Marxist approaches:

> a tendency to economic reductionism, with a heavy emphasis on the productive forces and their potential for breaking down outmoded relations of production, as well as upon the 'base structure' model, has been responsible both for encouraging a closer analysis of social and economic relations and at the same time for promoting a caricature of Marxist approaches to history.

For a different approach to the matter, defending the use of the term 'feudalism' for determining a specific mode of production while taking into consideration the different extended uses of the word: J. Haldon, 'The Feudalism Debate Once More: The Case of Byzantium', *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 17.1 (1989) 5-40; W. Kaegi, 'The Controversy about the Bureaucratic and Military Factions', *BF* 19 (1993) 25-33; a nuanced revision can be found in J. Haldon, 'Social Élites, Wealth, and Power', in J. Haldon (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium (*Malden, MA and Oxford 2009) 168-211, esp. 182-185.

of our own subjectivity – at least as long as modern researchers remember that they and their work are embedded in the wider social processes of their own time.[18]

1.3. Rivers of ink: the 'Byzantine Republic'

In recent decades, new publications attempted to provide alternative explanations to both the period's internal instability and the way the Byzantines perceived it.[19] Among these essays, an honorary place is reserved for Anthony Kaldellis' recent monograph *The Byzantine Republic* (hereafter *TBR*), for its high impact and the deep controversy it aroused among theorists of Byzantine political ideology. Although the scope of *TBR* spans from the sixth to the eleventh century, our period receives special attention in the monograph.[20]

Kaldellis proposes a revision of outdated yet pervasive notions about Byzantine political ideology, which he identifies with models designed in the 1930s. In *TBR* we find harsh criticism against those who follow that traditional approach, taking Byzantine representations of the

[18] The question of objectivism and subjectivism is also acknowledged by I. Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance: la literature au XII^e siècle* (Paris 2014) 48.

[19] One of the new-wave contributions on the material world of eleventh century Byzantium, based on mostly new archaeological evidence, gives more importance to climatic features. It has its virtues and its limitations (see Haldon climatic Anatolia and so on). A wider overview: R.I. Moore, 'The Eleventh Century in Eurasian History: A Comparative Approach to the Convergence and Divergence of Medieval Civilizations', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33.1 (2003) 1-21; and yet, older methodologies, focused on specific men and decisive battles, are pervasive, especially in popularising history: Brownworth, *Lost to the West*, especially on the chapters 7-10, dedicated to the emperor Justinian; while J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)* (Paris 1990) esp. 359-369 and 392-412 argued that Alexios had to contain the urges of the provincial élites to reconquer the Eastern lands, Mark Whittow and João Vicente de Medeiros Publio Dias argued that these élites were less interested in the recovery of particular regions than in ascending in the chain of honours and titles promoted from the capital: M. Whittow, 'How the East Was Lost: The Background to the Komnenian Reconquista', in M. Mullett and D. Smythe, *Alexios I Komnenos: Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14-16 April 1989* (Belfast 1996) 55-63; and J.V.M.P. Dias, *The Political Opposition to Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118)* [Phil. Diss. 2018].

[20] As Kaldellis claims, *TBR* could have only consisted on examples from the middle period of Byzantine history, but he wished to extend the chronological scope of the book in order to show the continuity of Byzantine ideological patterns across the centuries: xv-xvi, also 135; Kaldellis' views on *TBR* are equally present, though applied into a different frame, in his more recent monograph dedicated to the tenth and eleventh-century Byzantium: *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, NY and Oxford 2017); an earlier paper on a similar topic: A. Kaldellis, 'How to Usurp the Throne in Byzantium: The Role of Public Opinion in Sedition and Rebellion', in D. Angelov and M. Saxby (eds.), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium* (Farnham 2013) 43-56.

emperor as divinely-appointed at face value.[21] He conceives this 'theological rhetoric', which he identifies as the imperial idea or *Kaiseridee,* as an artificial discourse crafted by the imperial court, in an attempt to persuade the people into subjection, arguing that God protects the emperor.[22] In contrast, Kaldellis argues, the Byzantines considered themselves members of a πολιτεία, which Kaldellis linked to the Latin *res publica*, the Byzantine τὸ κοινόν ('public affairs'). This Byzantine πολιτεία constitutes, for Kaldellis, a 'republic' in the manner of the ancient Roman Republic and the early Empire. Their monarchs were chosen, not by divine ordeal, but by popular approval; what is more, the population felt entitled to depose them if their policy was against the common good of the πολιτεία. That model would correspond to what, until the Enlightenment, was called a *res publica* or 'republic', even if the polity had a monarch at its head.[23]

Thus, Kaldellis divides Byzantine political discourses into two categories, and then allocates them into a hierarchy between imperially-sponsored propaganda and the authentic way citizens thought about politics.[24] He explicitly chose not to dwell on modern theories of ideology for this analysis.[25] Instead, Kaldellis revises the primary material, giving priority to 'less formulaic' narratives, particularly historical accounts, over 'court genres', such as panegyrics and mirrors of princes, which, he argues, convey the 'official doctrinal positions'.[26]

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[21] Kaldellis, *TBR*, xi: 'The field ought to be more worried than it is that the basic studies that are still cited as authoritative for Byzantine political ideology were written by European scholars coping with, or trained in, the crisis of the 1930s, and that they valorised theocratic over populist political ideologies.' Right at the beginning of *TBR*, Kaldellis mentions some scholars that, in his opinion 'still maintain that Byzantium as Christian *rather than* Roman': 'Cyril Mango, Michael Angold, Averil Cameron, and Paul Magdalino': *TBR* 203, n. 2. Italics are Kaldellis'.

[22] Kaldellis proposes in xi and ix to propose alternative models away from court discourse.

[23] Kaldellis, *TBR*, ix, also 1-31.

[24] Kaldellis mentions that the survival of the republican values reached as far as 1453, though also recognised the existence of variations to the rule through the long period: *TBR*, xv-xvi.

[25] Kaldellis, *TBR*, 2: Kaldellis justifies his decision not to pick a given model of political ideology since these often are 'at odds with each other, and they are not always applicable to the specific terms posed by Byzantine material'. However, as Haldon, ''Jargon' vs. 'the Facts'', pointed out, our own approaches are so immersed in pre-existing intellectual trends that we should not jump over their meticulous analysis. Furthermore, and since the sub-field of Byzantine political ideology is mostly eccentric and now more debated than ever, does that mean that wider research on the history of ideologies cannot benefit from our scholarly input?

[26] Kaldellis, *TBR* xi: most of the previous analyses of Byzantine ideology were based on a few pieces of court rhetoric, mostly panegyrics or mirrors of princes, in whose texts one could find definitions of the ruler as appointed

The *TBR* is presented as a part of a wider project 'to rehabilitate the Roman dimension of Byzantium' as well as its Roman identity, by pointing at how close their authentic ideology was to the Ancient Roman canons, once the theological layer is peeled off.[27]

Analysing Byzantine ideology this way, Kaldellis argues, explains the relentless rise and fall of emperors due to plots and rebellions in the empire, particularly for periods such as the eleventh century. Between 1025 and 1081, about half the male emperors were violently deposed, one of them (Michael V) by the hands of an enraged mob. While previous scholars read violence and chaos as evidence of either moral decline or processes of social transformation, Kaldellis uses it as evidence of the 'Republican' ideology, which does lead into circumstantial political instability but, ultimately, contributes to the internal cohesion of the πολιτεία.[28] But, first of all, Kaldellis presents the rapid succession of rulers as proof of the ultimate inefficacy of the theological principles. As Kaldellis puts it:

> If the Byzantines were as orthodox as we have been led to believe, then how was it that they not only criticized their emperors … but also rebelled against them … and then killed them or blinded them, without seeming to remember God or his ordinations at such times?[29]

TBR, in combination with other monographs from the same author, has had a profound impact on the ongoing debates about Byzantine ideology.[30] *TBR* received mixed criticism following its publication. Mark Whittow's review, though overall positive, also criticised certain aspects

by God and legitimised to do anything he considers right to rule his empire; on the choice of particular sources for his research: Kaldellis, *TBR*, 4-7; see also D. Krallis, *Serving Byzantium's Emperors: The Courtly Life and Career of Michael Attaleiates* (Cham, Switz. 2019) 191: 'by privileging one type of document, the imperial panegyric and the Christian theology of power tied to it, over the more complex and demanding historical and legal texts, we have somewhat uncritically adopted the imperial view of politics'.

[27] Kaldellis, *TBR*, ix.

[28] This statistic does not include 'very inconvenient' diseases that forced rulers to retire. Basil II died at an old age in 1025, same as his brother Constantine VIII in 1028; Romanos III was likely poisoned or drowned, or both, most likely by his wife's men; Michael IV got ill few years after having held the imperial sceptre, being present; on the earlier readings of political instability, see notes 13 and 14 on page 18.

[29] Kaldellis, *TBR* 7; also on Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*: the Byzantine political system comprised political tensions but ultimate cohesion.

[30] Kaldellis was already well known from other many publications, and particularly from his monograph on Michael Psellos, which will be debated in a later section.

of the author's methodology, such as his election of the sources from 'more secular' periods of Byzantine history – mostly the sixth and the eleventh centuries – or the dubious inheritance of the Byzantine 'republican' values from Rome – using Kaldellis' criteria for what constitutes a 'republican' mind-set, would not the Ottomans themselves, or even the Ming empire, fulfil the criteria?[31] In the following months after the publication of *TBR*, John Haldon produced an article exclusively focused on analysing Kaldellis' proposal. Haldon pointed out the complexity of the Byzantine society, which Kaldellis tended to conceive as a solid sovereign people in defiance to the emperor and his court. He also underlined the necessity for a further definition of the concept 'ideology', based on solid theories on the matter.[32]

In my view, *TBR* constitutes a thought-provoking, serious proposal concerning the mechanics of Byzantine political discourse, which has inspired significant debate in our field. As Psellos once declared, 'good things are hard to come by'. However, the controversy around *TBR* multiplied good research by persuading some scholars to revise and defend their positions on the matter.[33] *TBR*, nevertheless, also constitutes a clear example of ongoing narratives of progress and secularism. In brief, my criticism of Kaldellis' proposal (following below) is two-fold. Firstly, the 'rational' thinking associated with republican values could not be as intuitive as pictured in *TBR*, rendering its distinction from any 'theology' ineffective for our research. Secondly, the connection between these republican thoughts and antiquity in *TBR* seem to be structurally yet silently tied to the aforementioned modern idealisations of the Roman past, altering the interpretation of the sources.

[31] M. Whittow, 'Review of Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in New Rome*. (Cambridge, MA 2015)' *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2015): http://www.bmcreview.org/2015/10/20151011.html (last time visited 22 July 2019).
[32] J. Haldon, 'Res Publica Byzantina? State Formation and Issues of Identity in Medieval East Rome', *BMGS* 40.1 (2016) 7-11.
[33] *Chronographia* 6.74.6: χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ, citing Plato (Pl. *Resp*. 4.435c); concerning the impact of *TBR* in practice: in his article dedicated to reviewing Kaldellis' ideas as exposed in *TBR*, Haldon labelled the monograph as a 'provocative challenge to many aspects of the established assumptions' concerning the field of Byzantine political discourse and political action: Haldon, 'Res Publica Byzantina?', 7.

Kaldellis sustains his argument for the 'republican' values of the Byzantines in the attitudes they displayed towards different emperors – attitudes he promptly identifies with non-religious beliefs. Such an approach is also reminiscent of the modern mainstream narrative that opposes superstition and a self-evident reality, as discussed.[34] Even though Kaldellis is fully aware of the existence of different 'ways of thinking' for different societies through history, he qualifies the Byzantine republican ideology as closer to reality than theological propaganda and, thus, more intuitive to the common people. In *TBR* we find an invitation to disregard formulaic theological explanations of power relations and contrast them with the convoluted political life as perceived in the historical sources. Kaldellis assumes that a Byzantine spectator will jump to the same reasonable conclusions as he does: the more 'reasonable' thing to believe was that the emperor had no divine protection against an effective rebellion.[35]

However, due to what we know of the functioning of ideologies in moments of political upheaval such as rebellions or coups, Byzantine perceptions could be the exact opposite. The common belief that traumatic moments increase people's secularism or a cynical attitude towards life has been contested. Rather the opposite may happen: trauma might compel the subject to mystify the moment and not to question the sacred but to believe even more strongly

[34] As Kaldellis declares in *TBR,* xii, 'We should not be approaching Byzantine politics exclusively or even primarily on religion'. However, we should remain critical when establishing the limits of what counts as religious and what does not: for instance, Bourdieu considered any enunciate that has the 'state' as the subject as 'phrases théologiques', since the state is a 'entité théologique, c'est-à-dire une entité qui existe par la croyance': P. Bourdieu, *Sur l'état: Cours au Collège de France,* 1989-1992 (Paris 2012) 25; I would say that the Byzantine belief in an idealised *politeia* can be equally considered a religious belief, that the Byzantines creatively combined with the claims on the divine support to the ruler, as I will develop in further chapters.

[35] As expressed by Kaldellis, *TBR,* 8-9:

> It is possible that the imperial idea is still promoted by scholars precisely because it is alien to modern western ways of thinking about politics. By proclaiming that they are in touch with "other" ways of thinking … scholars can establish anthropological credentials and reassure themselves and their audiences that they are respecting the otherness of a foreign culture by not projecting modern norms onto it. It would then be an anthropological failure to make the Byzantines seem too rational, normal, pragmatic, or whatever …. Our need to believe such things is probably built into *our* ideology.

Italics are Kaldellis'. Precisely that rationality or normality reclaimed by Kaldellis, I would argue, does not even exist in modern times except perhaps occasionally. It is not my aim to 'infantilise' Byzantium, but to stop measuring it against the backdrop of our illusory expectations for a 'civilised society'.

that the sacred must be somewhat behind those incredible events.[36] In this particular case, Kaldellis' opposition between 'republican monarchy' and the court model of a 'monarchy by divine right' might not have been perceived as such by those deposing the ruler: the πολιτεία, inasmuch as a reified, naturalised body, could be regarded as sacred.[37] God would bless or punish 'the Romans' or, particularly, their leaders, for their moral failures.

In fact, as I will argue through the following chapters, most historical narratives, before any 'theological rhetoric' is selectively discarded from them, suggest different combinations of republican values with ideas of superhuman entities reacting to different morally-charged actions.[38] For instance, the maxim *Deus adiuta Romanis* , 'May God help the Romans', was found across the empire in the time of Herakleios, in the hexagrams, the walls of Constantinople, or even carved on a discarded tile, orthographic mistakes included, by an inhabitant of the besieged Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica).[39] Thus, although the Byzantines brought up care for τὸ κοινόν multiple times, sometimes associating it with a Classical past, they brought Christian imagery as well, because it just as easily slotted within their flexible self-representation and was a suitable toolkit for explaining contemporary political events. *Deus adiuta Romanis*, a theological clause both in the subject and in the receptor of the action, may have worked as a proto-slogan precisely because of its practical flexibility: *Deus*, in particular, could recall anything to the listeners, from the dogma learned

[36] S. Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London and New York, NY 2017 [2008]) 26 on the use of obscenity to depict scenes that are too traumatic to be narrated as a tragedy, and 181-193 on the use of a 'cosmic perspective' as a way to adopt a convenient distance from catastrophe.
[37] Kaldellis, *TBR,* 5 and 8: Kaldellis defines the republic as secular 'not in that excluded religion but in that it was not defined by it, religion being only one part of the polity.' This concerns a very specific approach to the concept of 'religion', as seen in previous sections.
[38] For instance, as I will argue in chapter 3, Michael Attaleiates approaches the fall of Michael V on the hands of the popular rebellion as a divine punishment for the emperor's sins. 'The people' is depicted as the weapon wielded by divine Justice against the impious ruler.
[39] J. Brunsmid, 'Eine griechische Ziegelinschrift aus Sirmium', *Eranos Vindobonensis* (Vienna 1893) 331-333; Florin Curta summarises the episode the following way: 'during the last moments of the city, one of its desperate inhabitants scratched on a tile with a shaking hand: 'God Jesus Christ, save our city, smash the Avars, and protect the Romans and the one who wrote this'': F. Curta, 'Limes and Cross: The Religious Dimension of the Sixth-Century Danube Frontier of the Early Byzantine Empire', *Старинар* 51 (2001) 45-70, here 65.

through church liturgy to intimate familial experiences, or even Neo-platonic allusions to the perfect entity behind the world order. Even a non-believer may have nodded cynically to the maxima, 'believing through the other' and thus reproducing the belief system in practice.[40]

My second critique concerns Kaldellis' preoccupation with defending that 'the Byzantines *were* Romans' rather than in critically analysing what 'being Roman' has meant in different period and contexts.[41] Whereas he presents the Byzantine 'republican' ideology as a millennia-old product derived from the golden times of the Republic and the early Empire, the more formulaic and dogmatic theological propaganda is defined as a creation from the period following the third-century AD.[42] Thus, the Byzantines' millennial defence of Roman political traditions is argued by Kaldellis as decisive data for the rehabilitation of their Roman identity.[43] Tracing back Byzantine popular rebellions to the Roman Republic is problematic. As Whittow argued in his review of *TBR*, comparable popular tensions arise in polities that are not explicitly indebted to the Greek and Roman ideological legacy.[44] Thus, although the Byzantine interest in τὸ κοινόν could be coloured by ancient Roman and Christian motifs, which would then contribute to the framing of political strategies for individuals and groups, that phenomenon should coexist with a number of material and ideological factors that bring Byzantium together with other pre-industrial agrarian societies, not only ancient Rome. In other words, the Byzantines did not rebel *because of* their potential self-depiction as Romans, nor should popular uprising be seen as a thermometer for their Roman republican beliefs. Byzantine political actors of diverse background seemingly framed their reality using idealisations of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian past; however, political unrest itself derived primarily from

[40] P. Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernuft* (Frankfurt 1983).
[41] Kaldellis, *TBR*, x. Italics are Kaldellis'.
[42] Kaldellis' arguments must be seen in context with other asseverations for Michael Psellos, where the Ancient legacy looks like primarily secular. See the following section below.
[43] Kaldellis, *TBR*, ix-x.
[44] See note 31 above, on page 23.

a number of material processes comparable to other agrarian empires.[45] This thesis analyses the way in which these tensions and ideological traditions combined in the case of three Byzantine historians, as perceived from the narratives they produced about their time.

1.4. Contextualising the Byzantine Republic

Kaldellis' *TBR* is far from atypical in our field. To begin with, Kaldellis explicitly presents his approach as the successor of past scholarship, referencing in particular the works of Hans-Georg Beck, who portrayed the same ideas 'albeit in a preliminary and underdeveloped way'.[46]

Beck was a prolific author. He wrote on a wide range of topics, from Byzantine theology and heresiology, to social history and the functioning of imperial ideology.[47] Not too dissimilarly from Kaldellis, he approached the *Kaiseridee* with scepticism. In particular, Beck argued that the discourse about the divine appointment of the emperor played a secondary role in Byzantine political life.[48] Following the conclusions from an earlier publication by Agostino Pertusi, Beck separated the allegiance of the Byzantines into two categories: their condition as subjects of the Byzantine emperor and their loyalty to the political community (that he identifies with the terms πολιτεία and τὸ κοινόν).[49] Beck even cited two different oaths, found

[45] Haldon, 'Res Publica Byzantina?', 8-11; see also note 75 above, on page 34.
[46] Kaldellis, *TBR*, xii.
[47] Some of Beck's works are the following: H.G. Beck, *Vom Umgang mit Ketzern. Der Glaube der kleinen Leute und die Macht der Theologen* (Munich 1993): H.G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich 1959); on institutional history and political ideology: H.G. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Munich 1966); H.G. Beck, *Res Publica Romana: vom Staatsdenken der Byzantiner* (Munich 1970); H.G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich 1978).
[48] Beck, *Senat und Volk*, 10; Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, 46 and 78-86.
[49] Beck, *Senat und Volk*, esp. 13, 18 and 28-29. This notion of the Byzantine political ideology goes even further back in time: Beck claimed this idea was derived from an earlier essay by Agostino Pertusi on fragments of Petros Patrikios' writings. According to Pertusi, Patrikios' words reflected a political environment in Byzantium closer to a constitutional monarchy than to an absolutist realm. They also presumed the existence of laws in the empire that restricted the emperor's power: A. Pertusi, 'I principi fondamentali della concezione del potere a Bisanzio: per un commento al dialogo Sulla scienza politica atribuito a Pietro Patrizio', *Bollettino dell'Istituto storico Italiano per il Medioevo e Archivio Muratoriano* 80 (1968) 1-23; on the Ancient Roman precedents: H. Beck, *Polis und Koinon: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Struktur der griechischen Bundesstaaten im 4. Jh. V. Chr.* (Stuttgart 1997).

in a letter from the late Byzantine writer Manuel Moschopoulos, as evidence of the two kind of political allegiances practised by the Byzantines. The ὅρκος πολιτικός ('civic oath') bound the individual within the wider political community, while the ὅρκος βασιλικός ('royal oath') tied the sworn individual to protect the emperor and his possessions.[50] Beck emphasised the superior character of the Byzantine loyalty to the πολιτεία: protecting its interests, as formalised in the ὅρκος πολιτικός, over any particular imperial order. Many died on behalf of the πολιτεία, Beck argues, but few, if at all, sacrificed themselves for an emperor.[51]

The perspectives on Byzantine ideology of Beck and Kaldellis are similar in various key ways. Both scholars isolated instances of theocratic discourse on imperial legitimacy within panegyrics and mirrors of princes and labelled them as artificially created by the court and for the court's benefit,[52] and yet argued that this discourse was ultimately useless against the long-standing 'republican' ideology inherited from ancient Rome, based in popular power and the common good.[53] For both, the republican ideology depicts reality more accurately than 'false' theological belief.[54] Additionally, both scholars received criticism for their selection of sources in their respective research.[55] Being aware of the multiple similarities in their lines of argument, Kaldellis considered that Beck did not emphasise enough how his own view of Byzantine ideology differed from mainstream thought, and neither did he provide sufficient textual

[50] Beck, *Senat und Volk*, 20-21.
[51] Beck, *Senat und Volk*, 22-23.
[52] Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, 52-59 and 78-86; for Kaldellis' *TBR*, see note 26 above, on page 21.
[53] Beck, *Senat und Volk*, 13, Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, 38-39; concerning *TBR*, see note 24 above, on page 21.
[54] An example can be found in Beck, *Senat und Volk*, 10; also, in page 9, Beck's use of the term 'demythologise' is significant, when said 'eine Entmythologisierung des Kaisers in politischen Kreisen'; Kaldellis, *TBR*, 2: Kaldellis rejected labelling ideology as a 'false belief' inasmuch as the republican Roman beliefs were 'generated, maintained, and enforced by a broad political consensus. (…) It is not clear how a historian can argue that such beliefs were either true or false. It is, by contrast, possible to argue that the theocratic notion that the emperor was appointed to rule by God was false'.
[55] Dimiter Angelov summarised Beck's scarce source material in D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330* (Cambridge and New York 2007) 12; concerning Kaldellis, see Whittow's review of *TBR*, note 31 above, on page 23.

evidence for his theory.[56] In fact, despite Beck's work being esteemed by his contemporaries, not too many have engaged with him in modern scholarship.[57]

Thus, despite the furore that followed its publication, Kaldellis' *TBR* is not that new in its approaches towards Byzantine ideology. Furthermore, Kaldellis' arguments in *TBR* often come from common grounds as other leading works published on the same topic. That is the case, for instance, with Angeliki Laiou's approach to Byzantine views on ethics and law. First, Laiou considered Byzantine economical thought from two poles: the mask of piety and idealism worn by characters such as Kekaumenos, and the profit-making normality of the Byzantine economic life. The latter was the authentic Byzantine ideology, Laiou argued.[58] Furthermore, in a different publication, Laiou explained that Skylitzes was not as judgmental towards multiple marriages as could be expected, because these marriages were often convenient to his contemporaries. Thus, Laiou argues that, in Byzantium, 'there is a bilateral relationship between lawgiver [here alluding to the church] and the subjects'. Similarly to Kaldellis' *TBR*, Laiou also reminds readers that eleventh-century historians believed that emperors should not be above the law, which constituted a serious limitation to imperial autocracy in case the emperors trespassed the limits of what benefitted the common good.[59]

Another work that shares similarities with *TBR* in its treatment of political ideology is Dimiter Angelov's *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*. In his analysis of previous scholarship on Byzantine ideology, Angelov criticised a trend he termed

[56] Kaldellis, *TBR,* xii.
[57] Haldon, 'Res Publica Byzantina?', 6-7, noted the importance of Beck's contribution to our understanding of Byzantine political ideology; Kaldellis quotes, among those who adopted some of Beck's ideas, I. Karagiannopoulos, P. Pieler, E. Chrysos and I. Medvedev, but explains that their works are even less accessible than Beck's: Kaldellis, *TBR,* 203, n. 9.
[58] A. Laiou, 'Economic Thought and Ideology', in A. Laiou, (ed.) *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh Through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC 2002) 1123-1144.
[59] A. Laiou, 'Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes', *DOP* 46 (1992) 165-176, esp. 175-176; Kaldellis did not explicitly mention the closeness between his approach and Laiou's, except when he quoted Laiou's 'Economic Thought and Ideology' while discussing the Byzantine idea of justice as based on the safeguard of the individuals' possessions: Kaldellis, *TBR*, 76.

the ‘normative’ approach, chiefly represented by Beck’s work. Angelov remains critical of the ‘normativist’ attempt to find some sort of ‘constitutional’ framework for articulating the Byzantines’ fidelity to their *politeia*. In particular, Angelov claims that Beck decontextualises several statements and his theory about the *orkoi* relied on an insufficient number of sources.[60] Thus, Angelov, like Kaldellis, proposes a different approach, widening the scope for the analysis of primary material.[61]

Although Angelov criticised Beck’s approach, one can easily spot a number of structural similarities between his book and the arguments from *TBR*. Angelov divided his sources between those conveying ‘official discourse’ and other non-official sources. The latter group is then split again between ‘ecclesiastical’ materials and those which reflect an ‘independent perspective’.[62] That classification of the sources roughly corresponds to Angelov’s distinction between the ‘imperial idea’ and the ‘political thought’ of the Byzantines.[63] In a way comparable to Kaldellis’ ‘theological rhetoric’, Angelov envisions the so-called ‘imperial idea’ as a self-indulgent creation of the court, removed from the actual situation of the empire. Although the ‘imperial ideal’ might have once reflected the reality of a massively large and powerful empire, Angelov argues, now the late Byzantine court needed to come to terms with the small-sized Palaiologan Empire.[64] Among those accounts from outside court circles, Angelov presents

[60] Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 10-12; also on page 2, Angelov mentioned that he will not ‘try to distil ideology from imperial policies’, perhaps referring to the followers of the ‘normative’ approach; Kaldellis also noted Angelov’s opposition to Beck’s ideas in Kaldellis, *TBR*, 203, n. 10. Kaldellis supports Angelov’s disbelief on the constitutional frame Beck was looking for: Kaldellis, *TBR*, 204, n. 8.
[61] Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 2 and 17. Despite his aim to include more sources on his research, Angelov discarded legal texts by considering them unrepresentative of the period’s political thought.
[62] Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 15-22.
[63] Angelov underlines that distinction from the very beginning of the monograph as one of its distinctive points. The imperial idea or *Kaiseridee* has been already defined in note 47; the author’s definition of ‘political thought’ can be found in Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 14.
[64] On the contrast between a ‘fictitious’ imperial ideology and a more ‘down-to-earth’ political thought: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 417: ‘the old ideological constructs were now applied to an empire that had shrunk in size and had been transformed into a Balkan state’; on page 421, the author notes an intellectual struggle among the Byzantines to ‘bridge the gap between reality and the burdensome heritage of an anachronistic imperial ideology’; on page 423, Angelov noted that orators spoke ‘not always in the fawning tones of earlier centuries’, and the agents of imperial official ideology ‘did not lose contact with social reality’; on the imperial idea as a ‘false belief’ promoted by the elites, compare Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 417: ‘The emperor’s claims of supreme rights of dominion over the taxable wealth of the state doubtless corresponded

more critical analyses on the empire's situation, some of them associated with Platonic philosophy, and open to recognise that the empire's hegemony was approaching an end.[65] Overall, Angelov provided yet another example of the classical scholarly opposition between 'false beliefs' and reality, much in the line of *TBR*, though Kaldellis' provocative tone and sharp assertions managed to attract far more debate from fellow academics.

Recent research underlines that, even by the late fourteenth century, political decline was not written in stone – there were reasons for optimism towards the recovery of, at least, the southern Balkan territories.[66] Additionally, Angelov does not contemplate, for example, the possibility that late Byzantine expressions of imperial grandeur fulfilled other needs apart from

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to, and served to justify ideologically, the practices of imperial government'; and Kaldellis' statement on the 'theocratic imperial idea': it 'was an attempt by the court to ameliorate rhetorically the vulnerable position in which it found itself always in managing a turbulent republic': Kaldellis, *TBR*, xiii; similar to Angelov's remarks on the illusory character of the imperial idea, George Dennis noted how 'the imperial panegyric … seems to flourish as the empire declines. … It was, one suspects, one way of closing one's eyes to reality and living an illusion': G.T. Dennis, 'Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality', in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, DC 1997) 131-140, here 135; in 133-134, Dennis notes how:

> the modern reader [of imperial panegyrics], perhaps, is most struck by the extreme, almost sickening, flattery in these orations, which reminds one of the personality cult accorded to certain dictators in this century …. One wonders how the person so honoured could sit and listen to such unabashed flattery without feeling some embarrassment.

Dennis is consciously approaching the subject from his own 'modern' context, but does not deepen on the reasons why the panegyrics would work, beyond the wide notion that authors were perhaps 'just doing their job', and thus gained recognition and rewards, while the regime received validation: 134, 136-137, and 139-140; as a response to the arguments of Dennis and Angelov, see L. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (Austin, TX 2015).

[65] Some accounts attributed a central political role to the church, somewhat replacing the role of the state, while others merely acknowledged the general rules of the rise and fall of historical empires. In the three-fold division of Byzantine political ideology, the author dedicated the central section of the book to discuss the ideas of different 'secular thinkers': Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought*, 183-350, Angelov's views on Platonic-based discourses of the empire's survival can be found on page 420 (arguing that it had been suppressed by the Komnenian regime, but not afterwards), 421 (presented as the ground for Roman constitutionalist ideas of public power; although, Angelov admitted, Platonic ideas seemed to harmonise with 'feudal' political principles); we can find similar approaches to the role of Platonism in middle and late Byzantium in K. Oehcek, *'Aristotle in Byzantium'*, *GRBS* 5.2 (1964) 133-147; R Baine Harris (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism* (New York, NY 1976); N. Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon (*Cambridge 2011); the roots of the association of Neoplatonism with progress are deep – more than a century ago, E. Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Teachers* (New York, NY 1908) 268 depicted Hypatia declaring that 'Neoplatonism is a progressive philosophy'; a recent attempt to clarify the matter of the Byzantine reception of Neoplatonism and its relation with Christianity can be found in T. Lankila, 'The Byzantine Reception of Neoplatonism', in A. Kaldellis and N. Siniossoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge and New York, NY 2017) 314-324, esp. 316-318.

[66] R. Estangüi Gómez, *Byzance face aux Ottomans: exercice du pouvoir et contrôle du territoire sous les derniers Paléologues (milieu XIVe-milieu XVe siècle)* (Paris 2014) esp. 123-183, 315-358, and 533-539; on the last century of Byzantine rule, see also T. Kiosopoulou, *Emperor or Manager: Power and Political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453*, trans. P. Magdalino (Geneva 2011 [2007]) esp. 167-173.

justifying the court's selfish operations. From Ancient Egypt to the modern states of Armenia and Israel, the inhabitants of a relatively small polity can find comfort and meaning in their lives by reproducing narratives of past, or even present, prosperity.[67] The empire's political borders in the period analysed by Angelov have little to do with the evolution or permanence of so-called 'imperial idea'. Such ideal vision of a great, God-beloved empire could survive inasmuch as it fit in the daily experiences of the remaining Byzantine population, particularly within the capital. Much like in previous centuries, the discourses of eternal victory or divine punishment adjusted perfectly to both daily life and collective traumatic experiences, such as epidemics or sieges.

Angelov's monograph, among others, demonstrates that the main argumentative lines of *TBR* are representative of, at least, part of the mainstream of Byzantine scholarship. However, other scholars have ventured into markedly different approaches. One remarkable example is Nike-Catherine Koutrakou's monograph on middle Byzantine propaganda. Koutrakou also framed her research on the dialogue established between institutional propaganda and popular response.[68] However, here the *Kaiseridee* does not play the role of 'false belief' in the debate. Koutrakou emphasised that the more general *propagande de l'Empire* is left unquestioned while the Byzantines debate specific variations of these core ideals, often as a reaction to the policy of specific rulers.[69] There is little trace of an opposition between 'republican' ideas and a theological 'imperial idea' in Koutrakou's work. What is most significant is that Koutrakou

[67] On ancient Egypt, from the Ancient Kingdom to the Greek and Roman domination, see B.J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London 2018) esp. 24-26; for the case of modern Armenia, see R.G. Suny, 'Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations', *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (2000) 862-896; on Israel, see S. Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, trans. Y. Lothan (London 2009 [2008]) esp. 64-189; on discourses of exceptionalism in Jewish diaspora, see E. Don-Yehiya, 'The Negation of Galut in Religious Zionism', *Modern Judaism* 12.2 (1992) esp. 131.

[68] N. C. Koutrakou, *La propagande impériale byzantine. Persuasion et réaction (VIIIe-Xe siècles)* (Athens 1994) 47-48.

[69] Koutrakou, *La propagande impériale*, 392: 'Nous devons souligner l'absence de contre-propagande intérieure qui ferait face à la "propaganda de l'Empire"', defined as 'la propagande continuelle qui diffusait les thèmes traditionaells de l'idéologie impériale'.

identified typically 'republican' elements as rhetorical resort at the disposal of any agent of propaganda. While Beck and Kaldellis ascribe the 'common good' to a key and inherently legitimate cause for popular rebellion against emperors, Koutrakou categorises it as one among many tropes that the emperor could allude to in order to justify his own political decisions.[70]

Koutrakou's scope includes thorough research of the concepts used both by imperial propagandists and by the reaction to these messages; their means of propaganda (written, oral and visual propaganda), the techniques and procedures; the themes applied to the propagandistic statements, and then the public to which both propaganda and counter-propaganda is addressed.[71] In adopting such an approach in her work, Koutrakou's monograph adopted a methodology closer to narratology and to the reconstruction of the context that enveloped each argument, similar to that which will be attempted within this thesis. She also introduced approaches close to intertextuality and dialectics.[72] In particular, Koutrakou distinguished between the ideological particularities of the Iconoclast period and the later Macedonian type of propaganda. Nevertheless, she recognised that the immense ocean of traditions at the disposal of the Byzantine propagandists and their reactors resulted in a picture of apparent immobilism to the modern reader.[73]

Other works, by scholars such as Yannis Stouraitis, respond to some of the questions posed by Kaldellis from a historical materialist approach, emphasising how identity labels may be capitalised on by the elites, to resonate in wider social circles, and be used as a factor of

[70] Koutrakou, *La propagande impériale*, 390: 'La propagande impériale use -et abuse- d'expressions de valeur générale, de mots frappants tells que "la paix universelle" ou l'"intérêt de tous" qui sont les préoccupations premières de l'empereur. Elle met l'accent sur la généralité. L'opposition, au contraire, riposte par la spécificité'; also C. Holmes, 'Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Some Preliminary Inquiries', *DOP* 64 (2010) 80, convincingly categorised the 'common good' as 'the existing order worth preserving,' a suitable reason for the Byzantine individual to carry on with their work.

[71] In respect to the latter, Koutrakou successfully distinguished different kinds of public, as opposed to studying the 'Byzantine people' as a monolithic agent. Her work focused in the contrast between an urban environment and the addressing of popular assemblies, propaganda in a provincial environment, and the propaganda for the armies: Koutrakou, *La propagande impériale*, 389.

[72] Koutrakou called it 'un système de rétroaction, de rétroalimentation, entre les thèmes de la propagande impériale et ceux de l'opposition', also refering to the 'dialectics of stability', in Koutrakou, *La propagande impériale*, 392.

[73] Koutrakou *La propagande impériale*, 48 and 388.

political loyalty.[74] Similarly, Nicholas Matheou analysed Byzantine authors' 'senatorial' representation of the empire and their authorial selves from a socio-contextual perspective, emphasising the author's willingness to find a formula that fitted their personae into an empire that promoted and treasured the remnants of their imagined Roman past.[75] While Stouraitis and Matheou emphasise the use of tools from historical materialism, other approaches analyse power struggles and ideology in Byzantium, and other contemporary societies, from the perspective of charisma and the multi-folded origins of authority, deriving their methodology from the works of Max Weber.[76] Patricia Karlin-Hater focused on potential triggers of political turmoil in Byzantium, other than trespassing the limits of either Orthodox dogma or a secularised common interest: the spread of various rumours and oracular predictions inside and outside the Byzantine court could contribute to instability.[77] Furthermore, scholars such as Matthew Kinloch approach the academic narratives about the Byzantine past with scepticism.[78] The different polemics that *TBR* aroused may be symptomatic, among other factors, of the relatively diverse character of scholarly research in Byzantium. Although this review has shown that the premises of the otherwise controversial monograph have accompanied Byzantine studies for a long time, the increasing numbers of publications from different angles promise rapid paradigm shifts in the coming years.

[74] Y. Stouraitis, 'Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium', *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017) 70-94.
[75] N.S.M. Matheou, 'City and Sovereignty in East Roman Thought, c. 1000-1200: Ioannes Zonaras' Historical Vision of the Roman State', in N.S.M. Matheou, T. Kampianaki, and L.M. Bondioli (eds.), *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2016) 41-63, esp. 61-63.
[76] B.M. Bedos-Rezak and M.D. Rust (eds.), *Faces of Charisma: Image, Text, Object in Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2017); the use of Weber's methodology is frequent in the study of other premodern societies, such as the western Islamic societies contemporary to Middle Byzantium: J. Albarrán Iruela, *Veneración y polémica: Muḥammad en la obra del Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ* (Madrid 2015), esp. 17-38.
[77] P. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'enjeu d'une rumeur. Opinion et imaginaire à Byzance au IXe s.', *JÖB* 41 (1991) 85-112, esp. 86.
[78] M. Kinloch, *Rethinking Thirteenth-Century Byzantine Historiography: A Postmodern, Narrativist, and Narratological Approach* [D. Phil. Thesis 2018] 1-38; see also M. Kinloch, 'Constructing Late Antiquity and Byzantium: Introducing Trends and Turning Points', in M. Kinloch and A. MacFarlane, *Trends and Turning Points: Constructing the Late Antique and Byzantine World*, (Leiden and Boston, MA 2019) 3-12.

1.5. A narrative-based proposal

A key element of these paradigm shifts will derive from a fresh reading of the primary source material, even from well-known sources. In line with Kaldellis' suggestion of analysing Byzantine political ideology through a revision of contemporary historical narratives, I will analyse the ideology embedded in the discourses of three eleventh-century historical sources: the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos, the *History* of Michael Attaleiates, and the *Synopsis*, and its *Continuation*, of John Skylitzes.[79] Whilst their chronological proximity to the events which they narrate offers a privileged framework, in order to provide a more solid methodological background to my analysis, I will apply a narratological approach to these accounts.

The concept of 'narratology' was first developed by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969. Todorov used it to define a field that, in his own words, did not exist yet, but which might arise from ongoing trends in several fields.[80] The *Living Handbook of Narratology* defines narratology as 'a humanities discipline dedicated to the study of logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation'.[81] 'Narrative representation' alludes to the arrangements of phenomena into plots or stories, a basic human trait in the quest for understanding the surrounding world and one's place in it – hence the intersection between the study of narrative representation and 'ideology', which can be understood as a symbolic system or as a way to see the world.[82] Thus,

[79] Choosing to focus on eleventh-century sources favours my argument: Kaldellis underlined that his essay could have been exclusively based on this period, but he wished to demonstrate the continuity of Byzantine ideology throughout centuries; and Whittow criticised Kaldellis' focus on the 'more secular' periods of the sixth and the eleventh centuries. Analysing critically the historiographical debates commented above by focusing on the eleventh century is, thus, of utmost importance: see pages 20-27 above.

[80] From this very first essay, Todorov introduces narratology as a discipline 'd'ordre antropologique plus que linguistique': T. Todorov, *Grammaire du Decameron* (The Hague-Paris 1969) 10.

[81] J. C. Meister, 'Narratology', in P. Hühn et al. (eds.): *The* Living *Handbook of Narratology*, http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/ (Hamburg) (last time visited: 12 February 2019).

[82] E.C. Bourbouhakis and I. Nilsson, 'Byzantine Narrative: The Form of Storytelling in Byzantium', in L. James, *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester and Malden, MA 2010) 265 defined narrative as a mode of representation (not a literary genre), namely 'the linguistic representation of an event or series of events occurring in the past, regardless of whether the past be real or fictional'; see, also A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford 1982) 236-239; H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD 1987); I.J.F. De Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical*

narrative-framed accounts constitute a basic way of communicating information between individuals. Furthermore, as recent research underlines, emphasising particular storytelling or plot devices in a given discourse, as opposed to shallow description, enhances the validity and the empathy of the audience towards the story that is being told. Our mind 'digests' the information which is conveyed in narratives much more easily.[83] Thus, narrative studies analyse what qualifies as a narrative, and what universal and socially-constructed trends shape the constitution of narratives through different cultures and epochs.

Approaching an account from a narrative studies perspective often implies the use of a shared methodological toolkit and the search of field-based key questions while analysing the narratives. The figure of the narrator, namely the character narrating the story, often receives particular attention. Narratologists generally approach this character as a figure that is essentially different from the historical author, even if the narrator claims to be the same being. For instance, Cervantes presented the first part of his oeuvre *Don Quixote of la Mancha* as an authentic tale narrated in an Arabic manuscript he found by chance: that forms an ongoing literary convention, a particular fictional pact between narrator and reader, that illustrates the former's separation from the real author: Cervantes 'plays the role' of somebody who found a manuscript copy of *Don Quixote*, but almost certainly did not expect their readers to take it as a fact.[84] Recent research has brought back the figure of the author in narrative studies inside

Guide (Oxford 2014) 10: studying the notion of focalisation or point of view helped in 'lying bare the ideologies of texts'.

[83] Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 39: 'Nous pouvons donc considerer l'impulsion à narrer, le désir de partager des histoires, comme un instinct et un besoin humain fondamental'; A. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (London and New York, NY 2000); Nilsson and Bourbouhakis, 'Byzantine Narrative', 264: 'people tacitly acknowledged the capacity of a narrative form to supply them with meaningful understanding of their world and with guidance for life as well as death'; 274 narratives mattered to the Byzantines for 'their sense of who they are, and what they can know about the world, past and future', helping them addressing issues of 'self-definition' and 'meaningful representations of larger realities'.

[84] M. de Cervantes Saavedra, 'Capítulo XXII. De la libertad que dio don Quijote a muchos desdichados que mal de su grado los llevaban donde no quisieran ir', en M. de Cervantes Saavedra, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (Madrid 2004 [1605]) 199-210; see also F. Bernard, 'The Ethics of Authorship: Some Tensions in the 11th Century', in A. Pizzone (ed.) *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, and Identities* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2014) 41-42, 'In positioning themselves with regard to ethical issues of authorship, authors shaped a self-representational image that served their interests'; the figure of the narrator has been

and outside Byzantium, to the point that, as Ingela Nilsson summarised, 'authorial personas of ancient and medieval literature have been understood as more or less directly corresponding to empirical authors'.[85] However, it also seems convenient avoiding a complete identification author-narrator in our analyses, least we may assume, as Margaret Mullett denounced, that Byzantine begging poets were effectively beggars.[86] Narrative scholars also focus on the position of the narrator in respect to the narrative: do they explicitly comment on the events or merely 'show' them? Is the narrator a character in his or her own narrative? Another element that attracts the attention of narrative scholars – which will play a fundamental role in the present thesis – is the way characters and the space around them are depicted as well as the possible reception of these depictions. I will analyse the role of both narrative space and narrative time (the way a given story is put together, arranging its constituent parts in a particular order and focusing in on some elements over others) in the depiction of the main characters described in the four historical accounts. .[87]

Narratology is far from a monolithic field. In the last decades, mainstream narratological approaches have changed their course dramatically on issues of fundamental importance for this very thesis; the re-evaluation of aesthetic features in the text has gained importance, as has the role of the authorial figure, which reappeared from its decade (or more) long exile.[88]

questioned in Byzantine studies in the past, considering that, at least, some of the Byzantine literature displayed an impersonal aspect: I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Quellenforschung and/or Literary Criticism: Narrative Structures in Byzantine Historical Writings', *SO* 73 (1998) 5-73, here 10-11; also I.N. Ljubarskij, 'How Should a Byzantine Text be Read?', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot 2003) 117-125; similarly, narratees, the idealised projection of the narrative's audience, are analysed in terms of their relationship with the 'real' audience, much like the narrator differing from the historical author: sometimes narrators address them explicitly, and narratees might even appear as characters in the narrative: see pages 72-81 on the Byzantine audience.

[85] I. Nilsson, 'The Literary Imaginary of the Past as the Truth of the Present: Occasional Literature in Twelfth-Century Constantinople', in C. Taranu (ed.), *Vera Lex Historiae: Historical Truth and the Emergence of the Event in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York, NY 2019) [forthcoming].

[86] M. Mullett, 'Dancing With Deconstructionists in the Gardens of the Muses: New Literary History vs ?', *BMGS* 14 (1990) 268.

[87] I. Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 40-41; these elements will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

[88] Ch. Messis and I. Nilsson, 'Byzantine Storytelling and Modern Narratology: An Introduction', in I. Nilsson (ed.), *Storytelling in Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018) 1: Messis and Nilsson cited, as referential authors for the development of narratology as a field: D. Herman, 'Histories of Narrative Theory (I): A Genealogy of Early Developments", in J. Phelan and P.J. Rabinowitz (eds.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Chichester and Malden, MA 2005) 19–35; M. Fludernik, 'Histories of

Narrative studies differ in their treatment of the structuralist scope from now-classic narratologists, through their openness and procedure in breaking the barriers with other disciplines, and their approach to 'factual' texts, particularly historical accounts.[89]

In the past few years, a strand of narrative studies has focused on the application of the aforesaid methodology to premodern texts, first to Classical and western Medieval accounts.[90] Narratology entered the field of Byzantine studies at an even more recent date, as a tool for ongoing literary studies that recognised the implications of the so-called 'linguistic turn' namely 'the realisation that all our written accounts from the past are bound by narrative conventions, which have to be understood properly before the accounts can be used by historians at all'.[91] Following an early attention to fictional texts, Byzantinists such as Nilsson and Emmanuel Bourbouhakis proposed applying narratology to historical accounts as well.[92] By the time of these proposals, Byzantine historical accounts were one of the most scrutinised bodies of texts by Byzantine scholars. A general, still ongoing, feeling among researchers proclaimed that the traditional 'mines' of historical facts were mostly stale: novelties would

Narrative Theory (II): From Structuralism to the Present', in J. Phelan and P.J. Rabinowitz (eds.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, 36–59 and B. McHale, 'Ghosts and Monsters: On the (im)possibility of Narrating the History of Narrative Theory", in J. Phelan and P.J. Rabinowitz (eds.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, 60–71. Some examples of the most relevant contributions in the matter: M. Bal, *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen* (Muiderberg 1978); F. K. Stranzel, *Theorie der Erzhälens* (Stuttgart 1979); J. Alber and M. Fludernik (eds.), *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses* (Columbus, OH 2013).

[89] Messis and Nilsson, 'Byzantine Storytelling', esp. 1-2.

[90] Pioneer scholars on the matter were: J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA 1985); M. Fusillo, *Il tempo delle Argonautiche. Un'analisi del racconto in Apollonio Rodio* (Rome 1985); M. Fludernik, 'The Diachronization of Narratology', *Narrative* 11.3 (2003) 331-348; De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*: A. J. Ross, *Ammianus' Julian Narrative and Genre in the Res Gestae* (Oxford 2016); it is worth noting Eva von Cotzen's manifesto for the creation of a medieval narratology that successfully explains 'the forms and functions of medieval practices of narration': E. von Cotzen, 'Why we Need a Medieval Narratology: A Manifesto', *Diegesis: Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Narrative Research* 3.2 (2014) 1-21, esp. 2.

[91] C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400-1000* (London 2009) 8; see also R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C. N. Constantinides, N. M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys and A. D. Angelou (eds.), *Philellen: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996) 205-224.; Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 41-42; E.A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'', *Church History* 67.1 (1998) 1-31; it is noteworthy the existence of earlier concerns on the needs to revise premodern historical accounts from a literary point of view, as in L. Stone, 'The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', *Past and Present* 85 (1979) 3-24.

[92] See, for example, Bourbouhakis and Nilsson, 'Byzantine Narrative'.

arrive from lesser explored genres or from outside the literary field. Even further: years of research stressed both the dubiousness of previously-considered 'hard data' from Byzantine histories, and their clear political biases. A synthesis of this growing scepticism can lead to one of the first questions I was ever asked at a symposium: "Should we believe anything at all from a superstitious, elite-produced medieval source?"

Of course, scholars reacted to this movement, but in a range of ways. A widely-shared consensus suggests that, when analysed 'correctly', historical accounts offer key information about the past, both in terms of traditional political history and, especially, regarding the culture in which the text was produced and in all likelihood received.[93] Beyond this first consensus, each scholar aimed to sharpen their understanding of historical sources using different methodologies. Narrative studies proposed as a possible pathway that underlined the literariness of Byzantine historical accounts, not as an indicator of their unreliability, but as a key to decode and contextualise their words. Analysing history as literature allows us to engage with the linguistic turn, and also means to acknowledge that, without narration, the collection of historical data into a text lacks of any inherent meaning: it requires a story to pull it all together and convey a message for the audience. Thus, the scholar's tendency to separate historical 'facts' from fiction in their accounts must be under continuous self-scrutiny, as the goals and rules of literature as history change depending on its context.[94]

The recent combination of narrative studies and Byzantine historical accounts provoked mixed reactions. Kaldellis considered narratology as an overly descriptive methodology that did little to illuminate the deeper meaning of a given narrative.[95] In contrast, non-narratological

[93] A recent compilation of works on the matter, with diverse degrees of engagement with narratology, can be found in R. Macrides (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium: Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007* (Farnham 2010).
[94] Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 87-90; Messis and Nilsson, 'Byzantine Storytelling', 8.
[95] A. Kaldellis, 'The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative Ontologies', in S. Marjanović-Dušanić (ed.), *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22-27 August 2016, Plenary Papers* (Belgrade 2016) 293-294 criticised ''theoretical'

approaches to the sources have been criticised by an apparent lack of systematisation, while narratology precisely defends its methodology as semi-quantitative approach focused on reconstructing the 'horizon of expectation' of the text.[96] Current narratological research on Byzantine sources adapts the general toolkit to the specific characteristics and challenges of Byzantine literature, in particular its strong tendency to *mimesis*.[97] Narratology alone is not a panacea for the aforementioned challenges posed by modern subjectivities and internalised narratives about the Byzantine past, but may provide a more homogeneous framework to face the collection of source material.[98]

This thesis brings narratological tools and concerns to the analysis of the sources in two distinct ways. First, I will take into account some of the main theoretical points on storytelling as explored by narratologists, from the convoluted identity of narrator and audience to the transformative effect of narratives. I will also allude to the position of historical narratives as literature, relativising the classical division between reality and fiction. Secondly, the thesis' structure from now onwards will loosely follow the main points of narrative analysis as referred to above, paying special attention to the characterisation process, namely the manner in which characters are depicted and qualified as virtuous, sinful, prone to self-sacrifice, lazy, or otherwise. Thus in the next chapter, I will contextualise the narratives in terms of chronological context, intended audience, their authorial personae, and what has been debated about each work in terms of argument and style. Chapter Three will explore the main narratees in the

studies [that] tend to mechanically apply a priori typologies' to the study of the Byzantine historical accounts, further arguing that 'claims to 'narratology' often disguise banal or just redescriptive plot-mapping'.

[96] H. R. Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History* 2.1 (1970) 25; M. Mullett, 'The madness of genre', *DOP* 46 (1992) 243; Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 44-55 as an example of a more solid grounding on the meaning conveyed in the narrative for the intended audience, in this case concerning the activity of 'palimpsestuous transtextuality'.

[97] Messis and Nilsson, 'Byzantine Storytelling', 2-3.

[98] As E. Said argued in *Orientalism* (London 1980 [1978]) 22: 'Yet there will always remain the perennial escape mechanism of saying that a literary scholar and a philosopher, for example, are trained in literature and philosophy respectively, not in politics or ideological analysis (blocking) the larger and, in my opinion, the more intellectually serious perspective'; for instance, Nilsson's opposition of the Byzantine literary description of images to western 'realistic' style may benefit from furthering the decolonial analysis Nilsson herself defended: Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 13, 19-20, and 27.

different accounts, including some concerns about the role of two of our historians – Psellos and Attaleiates – as both explicit narrators and characters of their own accounts. Chapter four, a necessary digression on the qualifiers used to depict our characters, will depart briefly from the narrative frame, only to return with renewed force in the two following chapters, concerned with the spatial and temporal aspects of the characterisation process. The conclusion will summarise my key findings and explore their significance.

2. The narratives

2.1. Why everyone wants to be Psellos

Out of the four accounts explored here, the *Chronographia*, written by Michael Psellos, has attracted most attention from modern scholars. Psellos' name resonates with particular intensity within the field of Byzantine studies as a result of either his relevance as a political actor, the exceptional survival of hundreds of texts attributed to him, or the alleged quality of his writings.[1] I will argue that our interest in him is also mediated by our own particular philosophical and literary expectations.

Psellos' presence in the Byzantine political and intellectual spheres and the abundance of autobiographical references in his writings allowed scholars to trace his biography with extraordinary accuracy.[2] Born in the capital around 1018, not of aristocratic origin, his family was wealthy enough to afford him an education. Constantine Psellos showed his talent from a

[1] S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013) 2, collected some of the most hyperbolic praises to Psellos from scholars such as T. Lounghis, *Επισκόπηση βυζαντινής ιστορίας*, (Athens 1998) 273-275 (who presented Psellos as one of the greatest Byzantine historical figures) and A. Kaldellis, 'Thoughts on the future of Psellos studies, with attention to his mother's *encomium*', in C. Barber and D. Jenkins (eds.), *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden 2006) 217 and 233, who defined Psellos as 'the most witty, playful, and original of Byzantine authors … one of the best kept secrets in European history'; Papaioannou also concluded that these different praises ended up contradicting each other; however, while Papaioannou explained this situation arguing that there are many *Pselloi*, I will emphasise the existence of many approaches towards the same Psellos; also M. Jeffreys, 'Michael Psellos and the Eleventh Century: A Double Helix of Reception', in M.D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow, *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017) 19: 'Michael Psellos dominates the history of Byzantine eleventh century'; also see M. Lauxtermann, 'Introduction', in Lauxtermann and Whittow, *Eleventh Century*, xvi: 'there is too much Psellos' in our memory of eleventh-century Byzantium'.

[2] One can find a more detailed biography, works, and personal links of Psellos in Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 4-13; Papaioannou's summary is based in previous scholarly contributions such as the following: R. Volk, *Der medizinische Inhalt der Schriften des Michael Psellos*, (Munich 1990) 1-48; J. Liubarskij, *Η προσοπικότητα και το έργο του Μιχαήλ Ψελλού: Συνεισφορά στην ιστορία του βυζαντινού ουμανισμού* (Athens 2001); A. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, vol. 3 *(11ου-12ου αι.)* (Athens 2009) 59-75; A. Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (Notre Dame, IN 2007) 1-28; see also F. Lauritzen, 'Psellos and the Nazireans', *REB* 65 (2006) 359-364; F. Lauritzen, 'A Courtier in the Women's Quarters: The Rise and fall of Psellos' *Byz* 77 (2007) 251-266; F. Lauritzen, 'Psellos' early career at court', Vizantijskij Vremennik 68 (2009) 135-143; F. Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character in the* Chronographia *of Michael Psellos* (Turnhout 2013) 11-17; J.C. Riedinger, 'Quatre étapes de la vie de Michel Psellos', *REB* 68 (2010) 5-60.

very early age and, despite reluctance from some of his relatives, he was able to continue his studies and to initiate a precocious career in the Byzantine provincial administration. In 1042, at the time of the popular rebellion against the rule of Michael V, Psellos was a secretary dispatching messages outside of the imperial palace. Psellos rapidly ascended in the court of the next emperor, Constantine IX Monomachos (1043-1055) as a philosopher and rhetorician. At the beginning of his reign, Constantine Monomachos appointed Psellos as 'consul of philosophers' (*hypatos ton philosophon*), a position that asserted his primacy amongst other teachers in Constantinople. Psellos stood in that position until a change in the situation at court forced him to join a monastery, changing his name from Constantine to Michael. Psellos' monastic experience would last over a year, which possibly stirred criticism against him. He was back in court after the death of Emperor Constantine, under the rule of Empress Theodora. A year later, when Isaak Komnenos was leading an ultimately successful rebellion against Michael VI Stratiotikos, the latter sent Psellos as the leader of an embassy against the rebel. He depicted Isaak's triumph as a narrative climax in his *Chronographia*. A thankful Isaak welcomed him to his inner circle and appointed him 'chief of the senate' (*proedros tes sykletou boules*).[3] Even though Psellos portrayed himself as a major player of Byzantine politics, an insider to the court, his role decreased in the years following his conversion to monasticism. Psellos acted as proponent of the Doukas family, serving the emperor Constantine X Doukas and educating Constantine's oldest son, the later emperor Michael VII. During the government crisis following the defeat and capture of the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes, Psellos stood on the side of the Doukai. He aided the young emperor Michael VII during his sole rule, at least until other courtiers from the entourage of the eunuch Nikephoritzes displaced him. The date

[3] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 7.42.5-6.

and circumstances of his death are unclear; in any case, his presence at the court and literary production ceased towards the end of the 1070s.[4]

Psellos' surviving manuscripts cover a wide variety of topics, from *enkomia*, funeral orations, and hagiographies to treatises of various kinds, on topics such as demonology, the origin of lice, or even an *enkomion* to wine. We also have hundreds of his letters, addressed to different individuals throughout his career. They inform us about his family and his extensive social network, including fellow teachers and monks, patriarchs and other members of the ruling elite.[5] Psellos' fame among his contemporaries is attested, among other sources, in the historical accounts of Attaleiates and Skylitzes.[6] Later authors, particularly Anna Komnene, incorporated various elements from Psellos' works, and some of his writings, particularly his demonological treatises, became widely known in European intellectual circles in early Modern times.[7]

Throughout this thesis, I will focus on the most studied piece of writing from Psellos: his *Chronographia*, a historical account spanning the reign of Basil II to the beginning of Michael

[4] The discussion on Psellos' last years and death largely revolves around his identification with a character mentioned by Attaleiates, Michael of Nikomedia, who reportedly died shortly after Nikephoros Botaneiates began his rule in 1078; *History* 296-297/228.7-14; P. Gautier, 'Monodie inédite de Michel Psellos sur le basileus Andronic Doucas', *REB* 24 (1966) 159-164; G. Weiss, *Oströmische Beamte im Spiegel der Schriften des Michael Psellos* (Munich 1973); Volk, *Der medizinische Inhalt*, 4 and 34; A. Karpozilos, 'When did Michael Psellus die? The Evidence of the Dioptra', *BZ* 96 (2003) 671-677; against the identification of Michael Psellos as Michael of Nikomedia is A. Kaldellis, 'The Date of Psellos' Death, Once Again: Psellos was not the Michael of Nikomedeia mentioned by Attaleiates', *BZ* 104 (2012) 651-664; also dissociating Psellos from Michael of Nikomedia, but for different reasons: M. Jeffreys, 'Psellos in 1078', *BZ* 107 (2014), 77-96; in favour of Psellos as Michael of Nikomedia, S. Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 13-14, n. 36.

[5] Paul More documented 1790 items allegedly written by Psellos: P. Moore: *A Detailed Listing of Manuscript Sources for All Works Attributed to Michael Psellos* (Toronto 2005).

[6] Michael Attaleiates, *History* 21/17.26-27: Attaleiates presented Psellos as 'a man who surpassed all our contemporaries in knowledge' (ἄνδρα τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς διαφέροντα γνώσει); John Skylitzes, *Synopsis,* 496.83-85: Skylitzes presented the members of the embassy to Isaak Komnenos as 'superior to other men of that time in wisdom and eloquence, Psellos especially' (οὗτοι γὰρ οἱ τρεῖς ἄνδρες ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ καὶ λόγου δυνάμει τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην ἀνθρώπων διαφέρειν δοκοῦντες, καὶ ἀσυγκρίτως ὁ Ψελλός); for an overview of the relationship of these two authors with Psellos, see D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012) 71-79; E.S. Kiapidou, *H* Συνόψη Ιστοριών *του Ιωάννη Σκυλίτζη και οι πηγές της (811-1057)* (Athens 2010) 122-124.

[7] On the immediate reception of Psellos, see D.R. Reinsch, 'Wer waren die Leser und Hörer der *Chronographia* des Michael Psellos?' *ZRVI* 50 (2013) 389-398; D. Krallis, 'Michael Attaleiates as a Reader of Psellos', in C. Barber and D. Jenkins (eds.), *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden, 2006) 167-191; on the reception of Psellos' daemonological texts in early Modern times, see Jeffreys, 'Double Helix of Reception'.

VII Doukas' rule (roughly 976 to 1073). The *Chronographia* is conserved almost exclusively in one manuscript, the *Parisinus graecus* 1712, discovered in 1876 and dated at the end of the twelfth-century.[8] The manuscript is introduced by a brief title of dubious attribution, naming Psellos as its author.[9] The account is divided in seven books: each one corresponds to the reign of one male ruler, until the last book, which comprises the reign of the last five emperors. In describing the different emperors of his time and the events that marked their rule, Psellos produced a rich account full of autobiographical details, dramatic passages, philosophical digressions, and unprecedented generic combinations, awakening an uncommon fascination among modern readers. The internal book division, together with other biographical and stylistic factors, suggests that a first version of the account concluded with the death of Isaak Komnenos and the arrival of Constantine X Doukas to the throne in 1059.[10] Around 1073-1074, Psellos updated the earlier version of the *Chronographia*, adding the reigns of three more emperors, including Michael VII Doukas, the current ruler.[11] Although some scholars identified the substantial stylistic changes in the second part as the triumph of *enkomion* over history, I will argue that it responds to a change in Psellos' personal circumstances, which brings a new balance of priorities to his account. The change in the tone of the *Chronographia* has little to do with a sudden change in literary genres, or an essential abandonment of Psellos'

[8] K Snipes, 'The *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos and the Textual Tradition and Transmission of the Byzantine Historians of the 11th and 12th Centuries', *ZRVI* 17-18 (1989) 43-62; K Snipes, 'Notes on Parisinus Graecus 1712', *JÖB* 41 (1991) 141-167; the exception to the rule comes from the single manuscript of Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*, which contains the final pages of the *Chronographia*, from the end of Romanos Diogenes' rule onwards; on the date of Parisinus Graecus, see D.R. Reinsch, *Michaelis Pselli Chronographia* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2014) xix-xxiii.

[9] J. Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía en la historia: algunas consideraciones sobre los géneros literarios en la Cronografía de Miguel Pselo', in V. Valcárcel Martínez (ed.), *Las biografías griega y latina como género literario: de la Antigüedad al Renacimiento. Algunas calas* (Vitoria 2009) 175-206, here 178, argues that the title of the *Chronographia*, written at the beginning of the only manuscript conserved, could be Psellos' doing.

[10] Most importantly, Psellos remarked that his *Chronographia* would end at the end of Isaak's reign in *Chronographia* 7.51 whereas the book, in fact, covers more reigns, albeit in a different style; on the account's internal division, see C. Jouanno, 'Le corps du prince dans la *Chronographie* de Michel Psellos', *Kentron* 19.1-2 (2003) 205; R Anastasi, 'Considerazioni sul libro VII della *Chronographia* di Michele Psello', *Orpheus* 6 (1985) 370-395; K. Svoboda, 'Quelques observations sur la methode historique de Michel Psellos', *Bulletin de la Société historique bulgare* 16-18 (1940) 384-389.

[11] E. Pietsch, *Die Chronographia des Michael Psellos: Kaisergeschichte, Autobiographie und Apologie* (Wiesbaden 2005) 114.

self-proclaimed quest for historical truth.[12] Nevertheless, Psellos' partial distancing from his characteristic style in the last book of the *Chronographia* produces an uncanny effect among modern readers, similar to his other historical account, the *Historia Syntomos*, discovered in the 1970s and almost unequivocally attributed to him. While the first part of the *Chronographia* blossoms in detail, complexity, and an apparently sharp criticism of contemporary beliefs and literary conventions, the *Historia Syntomos* resembles a dry list of emperors, completed with sparse biographical details.[13]

Though modern praise to the *Chronographia* is generally axiomatic in Byzantine studies, scholars disagree on the reason for such admiration. Different scholars 'want to be Psellos' in the sense that they retroactively transpose their expectations on what constitutes literary or philosophical success onto Psellos, a figure who is now admired *a priori*. The *Chronographia* enhances that coexistence of markedly distinct readings with particular ease: if anything brings

[12] On Psellos' balance between history and *enkomion*, and the notion that the second part of the *Chronographia* represents an imposition of *enkomion* over history, see Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía'; Pietsch, *Die Chronographia des Michael Psellos*, esp. 114 and 118; Warren Treadgold argues that the *Chronographia* ended up 'degenerating into outright panegyric of Michael [Doukas]' in its second part: W. Treadgold, 'The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History', in S. Marjanović-Dušanić (ed.), *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22-27 August 2016, Plenary Papers* (Belgrade 2016) 285; A. Kaldellis, 'The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography: An Interpretive Essay', in P. Stephenson (ed.) *The Byzantine World* (London 2010) 211-222, esp. 213; A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Michael Psellos'* Chronographia (Boston, MA 1999) 11: 'the first part contains a coherent and complex argument that reaches its conclusion in the account of the reign of Isaac, and thus possesses a unity of purpose and design that the second does not maintain on any level'; some scholars have even aimed to read Psellos' discontent with the Doukas regime in between the lines: J. Walker, 'Michael Psellos on Rhetoric: A Translation and Commentary on Psellos' Synopsis of Hermogenes', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31.1 (2001) 5-40, esp. 14; D. Krallis, 'Attaleiates as a Reader of Psellos', 189-190; I revised these assumptions in F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano: Una revisión a la aproximación bipartita de la *Cronografía* de Miguel Pselo y la *Historia* de Miguel Ataliates', *Estudios Bizantinos* 7 (2019) [Forthcoming].

[13] Kenneth Snipes even considered Italos to be its author: K. Snipes, 'A newly discovered history of the Roman emperors by Michael Psellos', *JÖB* 32-3 (1982) 53-61; J. Duffy and S. Papaioannou: 'Michael Psellos and the Authorship of the *Historia Syntomos*: Final Considerations', in *Βυζάντιο, κράτος και κοινωνία, μνήμη Νίκου Οικονομίδη* (Athens 2003) 219-229; and finally A. Karpozilos, *Ιστορικοί και Χρονογράφοι* iii, 156-157 and 162-169, concede the authorship to Psellos, albeit with huge reservations; W.J. Aerts, *Michaelis Pselli Historia Syntomos* (Berlin and New York, NY 1990) x, considers strange that Skylitzes alluded to Psellos' *Historia Syntomos* in his *prooimion* instead of 'the much more important *Chronographia*'; R. Tocci, 'Questions of Authorship and Genre in Chronicles of the Middle Byzantine Period: The Case of Michael Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*', in A. Pizzone (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2014) 61-75 highlighted the wide ideological differences between the *Chronographia* and the *Historia Syntomos*; W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke and New York, NY 2013) 299 defined the *Historia Syntomos* as 'not a good story' and hypothesised that the account was commissioned by Constantine X as a schoolbook to his son and later emperor Michael VII, so Psellos spent 'as little time and effort on it as he could'.

consensus about Psellos' writings it is his ambiguity.[14] And yet, because the *Chronographia* has received a privileged degree of attention and praise in last decades, recent scholarship has recommended moving on and focusing new research on the lesser explored areas of Psellos' oeuvre.[15] Our knowledge of Psellos, his works and his time have clearly benefited from research on his massive corpus. However, I would argue that the *Chronographia* needs to be restudied for two main reasons. Firstly, narratology reveals new aspects of the text, and then are important for our understanding of Michael Psellos and his time. Secondly, there is a need to deconstruct the main ideological apparatuses embedded in modern readings of the *Chronographia*, as will be shown in my analysis of recent essays on Psellos' oeuvre below.

Perhaps the best starting point to analyse critically modern receptions to the *Chronographia* is to underline that it was not always applauded as it is today. As Michael Jeffreys recently argued, the discovery of the only remaining manuscript of the *Chronographia* was met with disappointment.[16] Most of the events covered by Psellos were already known thanks to the accounts of Kedrenos (late eleventh-century) and Zonaras (early twelfth century), the latter also containing direct quotes from our author. The edition of the only existing manuscript took decades to complete, partially because of the abundance of errors in the manuscript, but also because of Psellos' dense rhetoric.[17] Similarly, the translation of the book into modern languages constituted a slow process marked by controversy – translating Psellos

[14] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 121: 'one can never be certain how much to read into a Psellian expression'.
[15] G. Miles, 'Psellos and his Traditions', in S. Mariev (ed.), *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism* (Boston, MA and Berlin 2017) 81: 'The way forward for Psellian studies lies in detailed and careful readings of his many texts, in particular with an eye to how these combinations, transformations and balancing acts are carried out in the context for specific discussions'; M. Jeffreys, 'Double Helix of Reception', 23.
[16] Jeffreys 'Double Helix of Reception', 20.
[17] On the problems regarding the manuscript of the *Chronographia*: J.C. Riedinger, 'Remarques sur le texte de la *Chronographie* de Michael Psellos (1)', *REB* 63 (2005), 97-126; D.R. Reinsch, 'Warum eine neue Edition der *Chronographia* des Michael Psellos?', in K. Belte et al. (eds.), *Byzantina Mediterranea: Festschrift für Johannes Koder* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar 2007) 525-546.

is far from a straightforward task. Overall, the *Chronographia* seemed unnecessarily arcane and unreliable as an historical source.[18]

However, interest in Psellos has grown gradually as his literary production has been regarded as exceptional, not only in terms of quantity but also quality. Broadly speaking, and following a distinction Psellos himself mentioned (though he claimed to have overcome it), some essays seemingly praise Psellos the Philosopher, someone who expanded the frontiers of knowledge,[19] while others applaud Psellos the Rhetorician, somebody whose prose became irresistibly praiseworthy and desired by contemporaries.[20] These approaches engage with modern narratives about social and intellectual progress differently. They can perfectly appear in the same analysis side by side: for instance, Pantelis Carelos praised Psellos for his 'great culture and mastering of the language', which seemingly addressed both aspects.[21]

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[18] Modern scholars that criticised Psellos' transgression of the rules of history writing are H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. 1 (Munich 1978) 331-441; G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*; trans. Hussey, J. (Oxford 1968) 328 and 345, opposes the great culture of the man and how he misused his skills in his political life, 'which invites strong condemnation', especially concerning the cruel outcome of Romanos Diogenes; even earlier, J. Hussey, 'Michael Psellus, the Byzantine Historian', *Speculum* 10 (1935) 81-90 lamented the multiple insertions of Psellos' digressions in his account.

[19] Just to offer some examples, S. P. Panagopoulos 'The Philosophical Contribution of a Homo Byzantinus: The *De omnifaria doctrina* of Michael Psellus (1017/1018-1078 AD)', *De Medio Aevo* 5.1 (2014) 169-178 praises Psellos for producing an original work that builds up on the scientific and philosophical knowledge of his time with solvency and precision; F. Lauritzen, 'Psellos and Neoplatonic Mysticism: The Secret Meaning of the Greek Alphabet', in H. Seng, *Bibliotheca Chaldaica / Band 3: Platonismus und Esoterik in byzantinischem Mittelalter und italienischer Renaissance* (Heidelberg 2013) 29-45 offers an approach to Psellos from his ability to write a more provocative message codified in his texts; E. Fischer, 'Michael Psellos on the 'Usual' Miracle at Blachernae, the Law, and Neoplatonism', in D. Sullivan, E. Fisher, S. Papaioannou (eds.), *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot* (Turnhout 2012) 187-204; K. Bezarachvili, 'Michael Psellos: The Interpreter of the Style of Gregory the Theologian and the New Aspects of the Concepts of Rhetorical Theories', *Studia patristica* 48 (2010) 233-240.

[20] An early example comes from Ljubarskij, who praised Psellos' capacity to speak primarily about himself, even while writing a hagiography, as something 'revolutionary', I presume, inasmuch as it alters the genre rules: I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Michael Psellos in the History of Byzantine Literature: Some Modern Approaches', in P. Odorico and P. Agapitos (eds.), *Pour une "nouvelle" histoire de la littérature byzantine. Actes du Colloque international philologique, Nicosie-Chypre, 25-28 Mai 2000* (Paris 2002) 107-116, here 114.

[21] P. Carelos, 'Die Autoren der Zweiten Sophistik und die Chronographia des Michael Psellos', *JÖB* 41 (1991) 133; also in D. Krallis, *Serving Byzantium's Emperors: The Courtly Life and Career of Michael Attaleiates* (Cham, Switz. 2019) esp. 189-201, praising both Psellos' republican ideals and his very convenient 'guidebook of sycophantic self-promotion'; Pietsch, *Die* Chronographia *des Michael Psellos*, 1 also noted that scholarly interest in the *Chronographia* derived from its arguments and the way he discusses different topics; I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates. Historia* (Madrid 2002) ix-x n. 3, on the contrary, opposes the two elements enunciated above for her study of Michael Attaleiates: his inclusion of prophecies and omens could be either indicative of Attaleiates' 'servitude towards superstition' or the use of a 'highly effective dramatic resource'; nevertheless, there are also other ways of praising Psellos away from this dichotomy, as in the case of Psellos as contributor to

Those who praise Psellos primarily as a thinker who understood the world more accurately than his contemporaries, often end up engaging with discourses on secularism one way or another.[22] Psellos' corpus includes a wide range of approaches to philosophy and religion, from hagiographies and theological treatises, to suspiciously heterodox statements. In his response to Patriarch Xiphilinos' accusations of heterodoxy, Psellos responded by demonstrating the validity of otherwise heterodox texts, such as the Chaldean oracles, as source of knowledge.[23] Psellos argued that much of the knowledge inherited from non-Christian thinkers is nevertheless valid and compatible with the Revelation. Such statements moved modern readers to define Psellos as 'Christian humanist', sometimes arguing that Psellos would be unable to reject the omnipresent Christian ideology of his time.[24]

That argument, which concedes little agency to the individual to challenge contemporary mainstream beliefs of his time, was challenged by Anthony Kaldellis' monograph, focused on the argument of the *Chronographia*. In opposition to those who either disregarded Psellos as an 'intellectual dilettante' or those who conceived the author's thoughts as 'readily transparent' to historians, Kaldellis elaborated a hermeneutic analysis of the author's statements throughout

encyclopaedism: J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (London 1975) 55.

[22] A clear example of this tendency can be found in G. Katsiampoura, 'Transmutation of Matter in Byzantium: the Case of Michael Psellos, the Alchemist', *Science and Education* 1 (2008) 663-668, esp. 665 and 667, depicts a middle Byzantine society where attempts of scientific research were sparse due to their association to Paganism, until 'a more general secularisation of Byzantine thought and ideology' arrived in the eleventh century, to an extent thanks to Psellos himself, who worked on 'demystifying older methods' and brought something like the 'scientific method' for interpreting the 'physical world', instead of alluding to divine will as the cause of phenomena.

[23] Michael Psellos, *Letter to John Xiphilinos* § 5.

[24] Modern monographs that underline the combination of 'humanist' and Christian values are A. Del Campo Echevarría, *La teoría platónica de las ideas en Bizancio (siglos IX-XI)* (Madrid 2012); D. Walter, *Michael Psellos. Christliche Philosophie in Byzanz* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2018); J. Signes Codoñer, *Miguel Pselo: Vidas de los Emperadores de Bizancio* (Madrid 2005) 13, and in 36 summarises 'Pselo no es el pagano opositor del cristianismo, sino el Cristiano que racionaliza su fe con ayuda de su utillaje filosófico'; Pietsch, *Die Chronographia des Michael Psellos,* 60-61 also denies that Psellos is advocating for pagan wisdom; concerning how early Byzantine narratives approached Pagan thinkers as partially compatible with the Judeo-Christian tradition; see also D. Ridings, *The Attic Moses: The Dependency Theme in Some Early Christian Writers* (Göteborg 1995).

the book.[25] The argument Kaldellis claims to uncover, exclusively focused on the first half of the *Chronographia,* consists of the revival of ancient philosophy thanks to the combined effort of Psellos' and the emperor Isaak. This story, supposedly, would be 'consciously anti-Christian' and somewhat Platonic: Psellos, just as many ancient philosophers, passively accepted the religion of their respective times, 'but rejected them in their esoteric teachings'.[26] Psellos would not be safe had he stated his ideas openly, Kaldellis argues, so he camouflaged them amongst rhetorical allusions to the Orthodox dogma, only to be deciphered by smart sympathisers.[27] Although Kaldellis' approach to Psellos has become particularly controversial, other scholars such as John Meyendorff or, more recently, John Duffy, approached Psellos' arguments from similar perspectives.[28] Furthermore, scholars who explicitly criticised Kaldellis' representation of Psellos as some sort of crypto-Pagan, such as Juan Signes Codoñer, still recognise Psellos' heterodoxy and ambiguity as sign of revolutionary and dangerous beliefs.[29]

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[25] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 1.
[26] Kaldelis, *The Argument*, 123.
[27] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 1 and 185-186.
[28] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 54-65, esp. 55 and 62 criticises 'Byzantine humanism' inasmuch as it was unable to reconcile 'Athens and Jerusalem', and argues that Psellos' 'true state of mind' would follow these lines; Meyendorff labels Psellos' reconciliation between Platonism and Christianity as 'artificial', and considers it symptomatic of the limitations of 'Byzantine humanism', in opposition to Western Scholasticism and the Renaissance; J. Duffy, 'Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium and the Lonely Mission of Michael Psellos', in K. Ierodiakonnou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources* (Oxford 2002) 139-156, if only less focused on Psellos as a detractor of Christian morality; esp. 145 and 150-151, presents Psellos as a unique advocate for *polymatheia* beyond the traditional, Christian-imposed boundaries over philosophy; in page 154-155, Duffy concludes that Psellos strangely defended thinkers such as Proklos, marginalised by Orthodoxy, since 'his larger intention was to revive a moribund part of the Hellenic heritage', namely philosophy as *polymatheia*; Duffy also devoted other articles to read Psellos between the lines, pinpointing his subtle subversion of the Orthodox dogma: J. Duffy, 'Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals to the Theory and Practice of Magic: Michael Psellos and Michael Italikos', in H. Maguire (ed.) *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, DC 1995) 83-95; J. Duffy, 'Bitter Brine and Sweet Fresh Water: The Anatomy of a Metaphor in Psellos', in C. Sode and S. Takács (ed.) *Novum Millennium: Studies in Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck* (Aldershot 2001) 89-96.
[29] Signes Codoñer, *Miguel Pselo*, 13-14:

> El estudio de los clásicos había situado a Pselo en muchas ocasiones al margen de los preceptos de la Iglesia …. El concepto de los misterios de la fe que tenía Pselo se apartaba en gran medida, como veremos, de los dogmas cerrados de la tradición ortodoxa y era producto más bien de una permanente curiosidad intelectual que aspiraba a integrar filosofía antigua y teología cristiana y que al mismo tiempo no concebía barreras a la ciencia y a la argumentación filosófica…

See also Signes Codoñer, *Miguel Pselo*, 32-33: 'la libertad con la que Pselo jugaba con los principios de la religión cristiana y con la tradición filosófica y literaria pagana, su condición, diríamos, de librepensador, le convirtieron en un personaje molesto para su época'.

Kaldellis' monograph constitutes a large-scale attempt to make sense out of Psellos' pool of confusing, often-contradictory statements. The most crucial criticism to his argumentations might not be directed towards Kaldellis' analysis of the source, but the theoretical and methodological basis of his book. According to Kaldellis, Psellos is justified in his anti-Christian worldview inasmuch as he was a 'serious philosopher rather than a mere polymath or intellectual dilettante'.[30] As we move through Kaldellis' book, we find that Psellos could not be a mystic Neoplatonic philosopher (of the kind that might have played with the association between God and the supreme Neoplatonic One) since 'he had many other interests, and more urgent ones, than theoretical metaphysics'.[31] Before Kaldellis begins his reading of the *Chronographia*, he has subtly specified which kind of knowledge he conceives as universally useful: the sort of knowledge Psellos defended in his work.[32] As I shall discuss in further sections, Kaldellis adopts the belief that Psellos identified the Church and its dogmatic morality as the main burden for the empire, and then proceeds to discard statements and details from Psellos' text that do not match with the argument – arguing that those belong to the smokescreen designed to protect Psellos from detractors. Kaldellis reduced the purposefully complicated text, *Chronographia*, to a simple message advocating naked power fights where pious actions have no effect.[33]

My reading of the *Chronographia* comes from the opposite direction, aiming to return to the surface of the text and recovering previously-discarded chunks of text in order to reconstruct a complex belief system. Although I am unwilling to return to a naïve literal reading

[30] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 1.
[31] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 7.
[32] Kaldellis, *The Argument* 45, for instance, approached Psellos' political ideals as similar to those of Niccolò Machiavelli on the grounds that 'what unites all genuine philosophers is more important that what unites a given philosopher with a particular group of non-philosophers', there he quoted L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago 1952) 8; see also pages 273-278 below; in Kaldellis, *The Argument,* 76, he also compared Psellos' ideas with Lucian's Voltaire's on the basis that they Psellos also 'promoted a universal morality that was not based on explicit metaphysical or religious doctrines'.
[33] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 44: Psellos, similarly to Machiavelli, produced 'an amoral view of leadership… [the achievements of Psellos' emperors] depend upon qualities that no moralist can praise'.

of the *Chronographia*, I advocate for less emphasis on Psellos' fear of dogmatic repression when analysing his apparent contradictions. Just as in modern cases (let us not infantilise medieval thinkers) Psellos' language was naturally contradictory, as its statements constitute creative solutions to different coexisting discourses.[34] In the following, I will present Psellos not only as a detractor of some kinds of superstition, but as a man allegedly convinced of the existence of superhuman forces, or willing to remain clueless in his ignorance when confronting major traumatic events.[35] Envisioning Psellos' reading of history as essentially amoral has more to say about modern idealisations of secular thinking than of the complex ideology of this author.

Stratis Papaioannou's monograph on Psellos' authorial voice could be a suitable example of the second argumentative line: Psellos the Rhetorician. Papaioannou executed a careful analysis on the innovative ways in which Psellos represented himself in different discourses, paying special attention not only to all of his Classical and Late Antique models and parallels, but to the extent in which Psellos built upon them. Psellos imitated the style of Gregory of Nazianzus' homilies, but uses his model of *enkomia* to attract the attention towards himself, the encomiast, in a sort of 'auto-hagiography'; he also employs a female rhetorical gender in the manner of Synesios of Cyrene, but expands its use in order to become an object of desire to his audience, a source of rhetorical *pathos*.[36] Papaioannou distances himself from those who regard Psellos as a 'secular saint', and from the 'modern dilemma that vacillates between Psellos the pompous rhetorician and Psellos the ingenuous thinker', as well as from the view of Psellos as revolutionary, derived from the academic-based imposition 'to discover radical

[34] See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford 2001 [1953]); see also P. Bourdieu, *Le sens practique* (Paris 1980) 21-23.
[35] See pages 171-178, 223-228, 237-245, and 264-278, among others.
[36] Papaioannou's position concerning the relation between Psellos and the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus (127 and 153) and Synesios of Cyrene can be found in Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, esp. 127 and 153.

breaks, transgression, and subversion almost everywhere in the history of workings and culture'.[37]

Although Papaioannou describes with detail the *hows* of Psellos' works, little attention is given to the *whys* – which was precisely the centre of attention in the monographs of Kaldellis and also Frederick Lauritzen.[38] Instead of presenting Psellos as a revolutionary thinker celebrating the revival of 'true' philosophy, Papaioannou presents 'self-advertisement' as a main goal for Psellos' work by framing him as a 'professional intellectual', who used rhetoric principally as resource for survival, a way to please his aristocratic patrons.[39] Such a statement follows other scholars' research on the eleventh-century 'meritocratic' Byzantine court, which

[37] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 1, 3, 15, and 19; Signes Codoñer follows a middle ground here, distinguishing between those works from Psellos that reveal serious philosophical questions and his other 'obligations as a panegyric writer': Signes Codoñer, *Miguel Pselo* , 29-30; Papaioannou follows the line of R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C. N. Constantinides, N. M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys and A. D. Angelou (eds.), *Philellen: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996), 205-224, esp. 216-217: 'Psellos knew it was his tongue that got him into the palace with each change of regime, that won him his position at court and in the hierarchy of honours. Can we doubt that he manipulated his material and his readers?'

[38] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 1 and 3; F. Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character in the Chronographia of Michael Psellos* (Turnhout 2013) 2: 'The depiction of character is the main narrative instrument and objective of the *Chronographia*'; also on page 30, Psellos' idea of personality is defined by Lauritzen as 'the heart of the matter of the Chronographia'; even J. Signes Codoñer, *Miguel Pselo*, 22-23 tries to find an explanation for Psellos' self-centeredness beyond the concept of self-promotion; A. Weller 'Ideological storyworlds in Byzantium and Armenia: Historiography and Model Selves in Narratives of Insurrection' in Ch. Messis, M. Mullet and Nilsson, I. (ed.), *Storytelling in Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018) 72 included Papaioannou's work as an example of a recent scholars focused on pinpointing how Psellos chose the most suitable narrative structures considering their ideological and literary intentions but does not add further detail on Psellos' intentions.

[39] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 44:

> The social climate demanded self-advertisement. In contemporary Constantinople, a new aristocracy was on the rise. This elite invested in the appropriation of early Byzantine Christian rhetoric, such as that of Gregory [of Nazianzus]. This elite was also willing to encourage learned men … to work loyally in its service, praise its accomplishments lavishly, and justify its predilections for sensual pleasure and conspicuous consumption … Like others, Psellos, was conscious of this dependence on the patronage of this ruling elite. For instance, much of his work focuses on advertising (in the hopes of recreating) the support that Monomachos gave to his intellectual pursuits.

Papaioannou cited the unparalleled length of Monomachos' book in the *Chronographia* as an example; in following sections, I will discuss the multiple interests Psellos had in expanding his account on this emperor; see also Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 44-46:

> Patronage defined the social predicament of eleventh-century rhetors … With few exceptions, power and material affluence rested on the competitive love of 'honor' … for rhetors and teachers, without claims to high birth and family origins, uncertainty ruled … Networks of personal relations were too fragile and required much work to be sustained … It is in this social setting that one should situate Psellos' expansive and aggressively promoted intellectual persona. His mastery of discourse was the main asset that he brought to the struggle for preferment.

opened the ground to non-aristocrats who, in return, were meant to demonstrate their suitability for their court position by displaying their knowledge in convincing ways.[40] That eleventh-century 'meritocracy' has been signalled as the cause of new emphasis on author's self-promotion, abandoning the former tendency to discretion and humility.[41]

Although I mostly subscribe to Papaioannou's historical materialist reading of Psellos' context, there are limitations to that explicative model. As he argues that Psellos was 'conscious of his dependence on patronage' and mostly concerned with finding new ways to please his superiors, he overlooked Psellos' own justifications for his work.[42] We should be wary of assuming that Psellos or other agents at court conceived their lives the way we may see them from a historical materialist displaying, even if they seem to display an 'aggressively promoted intellectual persona'.[43] A brief response to that premise may come from Karl Marx's now-classic maxim, 'they do not know it, but they do it'.[44] Approaching the Byzantine explanations

[40] See P. Lemerle 'Le gouvernement des philosophes': notes et remarques sur l'enseignement, les écoles, la culture', in P. Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantine* (Paris 1977) 195-248; M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1205-1204* (London and New York, NY 1997 [1985]) 99-114; Haldon, 'Social Élites, Wealth, and Power', in J. Haldon (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium* (Malden, MA and Oxford 2009) 179 defined Psellos' ideology as 'meritocratic'; F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025-1081* (Oxford 2014) 155-207; F. Bernard, 'The Ethics of Authorship: Some Tensions in the 11th Century', in A. Pizzone (ed.) *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* (Berlin and Boston, MA 2014) 51 depicted a situation, during the reign of Constantine Monomachos, where intellectuals occupied a prominent position at court 'based solely upon their merits as intellectuals', which Bernard considered a unique situation in the Byzantine society. 'They could not deny that they had realized their ambitions thanks to οι λόγοι, and this made them an easy target for accusations from rivals'; see also S. Papaioannou, 'Michael Psellos' rhetorical gender', *BMGS* 24 (2000) 133-146: Papaioannou argues that Psellos had to distinguish himself from the imperial court, the aristocracy that was claiming the political power; also Pietsch, *Die Chronographia des Michael Psellos,* 132-133.

[41] A. P. Kazhdan, A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA 1985) 222-223; on poetry M.D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres. Texts and Contexts*, vol. 1 (Vienna 2003) 38-39.

[42] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 44 and 230; Papaioannou, 'Michael Psellos' Rhetorical Gender', 144-146; Psellos himself presented the creation of his *Chronographia* as an uneasy job, since it forced him to come to terms, as a critical historian, with the policy of his former patron Constantine IX Monomachos: *Chronographia* 6.22-28.

[43] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 46.

[44] A. Dragstedt, *Value: Studies by Karl Marx* (London 1976) 7-40, referring to commodities; let us not take the formula as an easy way to infantilise pre-modern practices, but as something that can both apply to both pre-modern and contemporary societies: S. Žižek, *Porque no saben lo que hacen: el* sinthome *ideológico*, trans. J. Madariaga (Madrid 2017) 75-77: Žižek compares Marx' aforementioned formula, together with the Marxist concept of 'commodity', to Sloterdijk's own formula, which Žižek supports: 'they know very well what they are doing, and yet they do it', meaning that, even if you are cynically aware of the nullity of contemporary ideological presuppositions, you are *de facto*, in your routine, unaware of the ideological 'ghost' that structures the social reality: P. Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernuft* (Frankfurt 1983); therefore, the *paideia* could be approached

of their practices may help understanding why subjects such as Psellos would act sometimes as apparently irrational economic agents. For instance, Psellos' devotion to high-register, obscure materials can be explained to be a result of belief systems largely consolidated from previous generations, which offered *a priori*, socially-constructed meanings to their practices.[45] Psellos and other court members likely explained their own lives, even to themselves, as something more than a circle of endless self-promotion. For instance, Psellos depicted the court as an unstable, and therefore dangerous, space for people like him: while Papaioannou linked Psellos' words to his hypothetical urge to keep promoting himself even more desperately, Psellos usually associates the risks taken in courtly life with stoic stances about life's unpredictability.[46] In this respect, Kaldellis' quest for a distinctively philosophical argument that matched Psellos' own goals seemingly provides an adequate antithesis.[47]

Euthymia Pietsch's monograph on Psellos apparently moves between the discourses of Kaldellis and Papaioannou. Pietsch underlines Psellos' focus on self-promotion, but does not describe it as a necessity for competition, but as a literary step forward, which is worthy of applause *per se*.[48] Pietsch seemingly elevates literary innovation as a universal category for

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not only as a tool for social promotion, but as 'the unique possession of those who had separated themselves from the average man by their knowledge of and appreciation for the words, ideas and texts of classical Antiquity', following the definition written by E. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley, CA and London 2006) 2; further discussion on A. Kaldellis 'Late Antiquity Dissolves', *Marginalia. Los Angeles Review of Books* (2015), https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/late-antiquity-dissolves-by-anthony-kaldellis/ (last time visited: 14 September 2019): 'classical *paideia* is often seen exclusively as a productive social artifact, a function of elite identity and formation. Rarely is the ideational content of that *paideia* brought into the discussion'.

[45] P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power' (trans. L.J.D. Wacquant), *Sociological Theory* 7 (1989) 14-25, esp. 14-15.

[46] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 45; Michael Psellos, *Letter KD 34* 54.13-14 for Psellos' letter to Mauropos.

[47] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 1; Kaldellis, 'The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography', 213 describes Psellos' motives to write his *Chronographia* as 'intellectual …. to set forth a new intellectual agenda for the court and empire'.

[48] Pietsch declares that Psellos' desire to make his own life a polar centre of his account is clearly innovative: in Pietsch, *Die* Chronographia *des Michael Psellos*, 130, she underlines how Psellos praised literary novelty, also seen in P. Agapitos, 'Narrative, Rhetoric and Drama Rediscovered: Scholars and Poets in Byzantium Interpret Heliodoros', in R. Hunter (ed.), *Studies in Heliodorus* (Cambridge 1998) 126-156; then Pietsch, *Die* Chronographia *des Michael Psellos*, 14-20 and 131, underlines Psellos' 'self-confidence' and his work's 'literary quality', applauding his 'artistic value' and 'personal tone'; this argument has been applied to Psellos' philosophical texts in K. Ierodiakonnou, 'The Self-Concious Style of Some Byzantine Philosophers (11th–14th

measuring Psellos' worth when arguing that, despite his contemporaries' potential lack of sympathy, he nevertheless chose not to follow the rules of tradition 'as a slave'.[49]

However, I will not approach Psellos' work as if he fundamentally made a case for more personal literary forms. Other scholars, such as Graeme Miles or Charles Barber, offer a different kind of synthesis between Psellos' self-promotion and survival at court, and the author's use of existing intellectual trends in order to explain his social context. Miles emphasises the combination of pre-Christian, Platonic thought and the Christian Revelation in Psellos' philosophy, not justifying his complicated statements as a product of loose thinking or fear of repression, but as a way to come to terms with the limits of human cognition.[50] Like

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Century)', in C. Angelidi (ed.), *Byzantium Matures: Choices, Sensitivities and Modes of Expression* (Athens 2004) 100-101: for Katerina Ierodiakonnou, Psellos' work becomes paradigmatic of a period of 'heightened personal involvement' in Byzantine literature; she quotes, in that respect, A. Kazhdan and A.W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA 1985) 197-230, these authors approach Byzantine cultural innovation as the process moving from 'abstraction' towards 'naturalism' and from 'impersonal' writing towards the 'personal'; other scholars, such as Papaioannou, have attempted to nuance these teleological approaches towards Byzantine literature: S. Papaioannou, 'Η μίμηση στη ρητορική θεωρία του Μιχαήλ Ψελλού', in C. Angelidi (ed.), *Byzantium Matures: Choices, Sensitivities and Modes of Expression* (Athens 2004) 87-98, esp. 87-88, see also P. Odorico, 'Poésies à la marge, réflexions personnelles? Quelques observations sur les poésies du Parisinus graecus 1711', in F. Bernard and K. Demoen (eds.), *Poetry and Its Contexts in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Farnham 2012) 207-224; I. Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance: la littérature au XIIe siècle* (Paris 2014) esp. 28-29.

[49] Pietsch, *Die* Chronographia *des Michael Psellos*, 132:

> Es dürfte der Wahrheit näher kommen, wenn man Psellos' gewagte literarische Innovation primär auf seine ganz persönliche Selbständigkeit und Originalität zurückführt. Sie gab ihm den nötigen Mut dazu, den überlieferten literarischen Vorschriften nicht sklavisch zu folgen, sondern sie unverhohlen zu überschreiten oder neuartig einzusetzen, um seine ganz persönlichen literarischen Ziele zu erfüllen.

Earlier in the same page, Pietsch argues for the lack of popularity of Psellos' style based on the lack of surviving manuscripts, which can be a misguiding factor as the reception of middle Byzantine manuscripts necessarily undergo several subsequent stages from the twelfth century until the nineteenth: I. Nilsson, 'The Literary Imaginary of the Past as the Truth of the Present: Occasional Literature in Twelfth-Century Constantinople', in C. Taranu, (ed.), *Vera Lex Historiae: Historical Truth and the Emergence of the Event in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York, NY 2019) [forthcoming]; furthermore, Pietsch's argument for Psellos' literary partisanship is explicitly addressing earlier statements, which criticised Byzantine literature from a reified, Eurocentric conception of literary quality, which praises aestheticism and a strong, distinct authorial voice as an absolute virtue: see, for instance, R. Jenkins, *Dionysius Solomós* (Cambridge 1940) 57: 'The Byzantine empire remains almost the unique example of a highly civilised state, lasting for more than a millennium, which produced hardly any educated writing which can be read with pleasure for its literary merit alone'; cited in Pietsch, *Die* Chronographia *des Michael Psellos*, 133 n. 231; as I argued above, Byzantine scholars have often endorsed outdated narratives about the past, 'playing their game' instead of helping in deconstructing these narratives altogether: see page 10 above; scholarly concerns for the Byzantine author's position in the narrative of the 'discovery of the individual' precedes Pietsch's work by several decades: Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', 223-224.

[50] Miles, 'Psellos and his Traditions', 80: 'These (theological) works, far from being pressed upon him, represent a conscious and deliberate choice to work within the Christian discourse and an Orthodox tradition which Psellos clearly knew very well'; in 83, Mile notes how Psellos usually associated those philosophers he does not like with

Papaioannou and Pietsch, Miles acknowledges some degree of uniqueness in Psellos' style and links it to his social context; however, similarly to Kaldellis, Miles argues that Psellos explained his intellectual practices as an attempt to share his knowledge – he is almost out of the cave of ignorance, and has the ability to tell others the way out.[51] Psellos himself presented myths, history and pleasing speech as a 'game for the philosopher' (παιδιὰ … τῷ φιλοσόφῳ): they can be tools for a master logician to explain complex principles to a diverse audience.[52]

One can compare the occasionally divergent approaches of Barber and Papaioannou concerning Psellos' authorial goals in their recent translation and commentary of Psellos' writings on literature and art. For example, while Papaioannou draws the reader's attention to Psellos' 'avoidance of introducing moral principles in aesthetic judgment' and declares that the author 'does not submit the pleasure of reading and creativity to moral or ontological constraints', Barber instead approaches Psellos' view on aesthetics as 'bound to Christian and Neoplatonic assumptions', transected by the Platonic division between the sensible and intelligible worlds. According to Barber, Psellos envisions humankind as bound to both worlds and, in order to rightfully perceive, for instance, an icon, Psellos advises appreciating the 'sensible dimension' of the masterpiece through recognising the origin of its brilliance in the intelligible world.[53] Psellos' thoughts, read through the prism of Barber's interpretation, may

heresies, while those philosophers he agrees with were associated to Orthodoxy: in Miles' words, 'the use of Neoplatonic arguments in discussion of Christian theology is a characteristic Psellian trait'.

[51] Miles, 'Psellos and his Traditions', 82 argued that 'teaching of this sort was something that Psellos found in need of reviving', instead of a mere tool for self-promotion; Macrides, 'The Historian in History', esp. 215-216 and 223-224 seemed to hold a point halfway between Pietsch and Miles, both considering Psellos' interest in reflecting everything in his account to himself (self-promotion as a mark of literary progress) and the role of *theatra* in leading to the author's insertion in the account as a way to show one's credentials and, perhaps in the case of Psellos, to educate others; Ruth and I did not have a chance to discuss this particular point, but she did not seem particularly displeased with my approach to Psellos' self-representation in the *Chronographia* on pages 124-130.

[52] Michael Psellos, *Philosophica Minora*, vol. 1, 43.4-7; C. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2007) 71 presented Psellos 'as a Neoplatonic thinker who was willing to bring this immense legacy to bear upon the questions of the day'.

[53] S. Papaioannou, 'Introduction to Part One', in C. Barber and S. Papaioannou (eds.), *Michael Psellos on Literature and Art: A Byzantine Perspective on Aesthetics* (Notre Dame, IN 2017) 11-19, esp. 17-19 for Papaioannou's remarks; C. Barber 'Introduction to Part Two', in Barber and Papaioannou, *Literature and Art*, 247-261, esp. 247-261 for Barber's; Christine Angelidi's introduction to Psellos' 'On Ancient Works of Art' also

be unconventional in his time, but are certainly not beyond morality, as Papaioannou implies. My own appreciation of Psellos' political ideology is greatly indebted from the high volume of research on this author, but will find its clearest parallels in the approaches adopted by Miles and Barber.[54] In this vein, the following chapters explore how the *Chronographia* reveals Psellos' use of Neoplatonic ethical and political principles to convey arguments on the past and present of the empire, and then the empire's relation to the character of his contemporary rulers.

2.2. Why nobody wants to be Attaleiates

Both the life of Michael Attaleiates and the modern reception of his oeuvre followed Michael Psellos and his *Chronographia* quite closely. Attaleiates was born in or near the Anatolian town of Attaleia around 1025.[55] He soon moved to Constantinople to continue with his studies, at the time when Psellos' career and fame as courtier and teacher were flourishing.[56] Attaleiates progressed slowly in his career up to the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes, to whom he followed as a 'judge of the army' (*krites tou stratopedou*) in his campaigns in Asia Minor up to the defeat at Manzikert.[57] Then he returned to court, where he composed a treatise on law (known as

emphasises the author's display of a Neoplatonic imagery in order to understand the artistic works: C. Angelidi, 'On Ancient Works of Art (*Or. min.* 33 and 34)', in Barber and Papaioannou, *Literature and Art*, 285-289.

[54] Other relevant works on the matter are K.P. Chrestou, 'Ἡ ἐπίδραση τοῦ Πρόκλου Διαδόχου στὸ φιλοσοφικὸ ἔργο τοῦ Μιχαὴλ Ψελλοῦ: Ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ὁ νοητὸς κόσμος', *Βυζαντινά* 25 (2005) 117-175; F. Lauritzen, 'L'ortodossia neoplatonica di Psello', *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 47 (2010) 285-291; F. Lauritzen, 'Psellos the Hesychast: A Neoplatonic Reading of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor', *BSl* 70 (2012) 167-180; F. Lauritzen, 'Psellos and Neoplatonic Mysticism', 29-43; particularly relevant for the discussion of Psellos' composition of his characters and their relation with the surrounding environment: F. Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character*; D.J. O'Meara, 'Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus (Philosophica minora vol. II)', in C.F. Collatz (ed.), *Dissertatiunculae Criticae: Festschrift für Günther Christian Hansen* (Würzburg 1998) 431-439, esp. 438 for a relatively sceptical approach to Psellos' 'attitude oficielle' in support of the Christian values; D.J. O'Meara, 'Michael Psellos', in S. Gersh (ed.), *Interpreting Proclus: From Antiquity to the Reinassance* (Cambridge 2014) 165-181.

[55] Lemerle, Gautier and Pérez Martín argue for the 1020s as the date for Attaleiates' birth: P. Lemerle *Cinq études*, 76 n. 8; P. Gautier, 'La *Diataxis* de Michel Attaliate', *REB* 39 (1981) 5-143, here 12; Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xxvii-xxviii; E. T. Tsolakis, 'Aus dem Leben des Michel Attaleiates (seine Heimatstadt, sein Geburts- und Todesjahr', *BZ* 58 (1965) 3-10, here 7-9 argues that Attaleiates was born around 1030-1035; Kaldellis and Krallis, *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, vii, argued that Attaleiates was born around 1025.

[56] Concerning his private life, Attaleiates married twice, first with a woman named Sophia and then with Eirene, who gave him a son, Theodoros; more detailed summaries of the author's life can be found in Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 1-42 and Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xxv-xxxiv.

[57] The title of *krites tou stratopedou* is an odd one, and was not attested previously in the administration; for more information, see J. Haldon, 'The *Krites tou Stratopedou*: A New Office for a New Situation?', *Travaux et mémoires* 14 (2002) 279–86.

Ponema Nomikon) dedicated to Michael VII Doukas. He would later compose the *Diataxis*, an account that certified the establishment of a monastery in Constantinople and a poor house in Raidestos, also containing valuable biographical information on their patron Attaleiates.[58]

However, his best known work is the *History*, describing the events that occurred between the reign of Michael IV Paphlagon (1034-1041) and the first two years of Nikephoros III Botaneiates' rule (1078-1080); it thus covered a time span not very different from the *Chronographia*.[59] The *History* is conserved in two manuscripts, *Parisinus Coislin graecus* 136 and, only partially, *Escurialensis* T.III.9, both produced in the following century and inserted in wider compilations as a continuation of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, which ended in 1057.[60] In both cases, the manuscripts do not display any formal internal division. Nevertheless, scholars agree that the original account was probably composed in subsequent stages around the 1070s. Perhaps, as Inmaculada Pérez Martín hypothesised, the work found its origins in the author's notes on the campaigns of Romanos IV, and Attaleiates reworked and expanded his materials on the following decade.[61] The difference in the titles held by Attaleiates in the two juxtaposed 'introductions' of the *History* supports the theory that a first draft of the *History* was presented as a celebration of Botaneiates' ascension to the throne, and was later expanded with the

[58] On the *Ponema Nomikon* and *Diataxis*, Krallis argues for further attention towards these less famous works from Attaleiates, but his argument for the secular agenda present in the *Ponema Nomikon* seems unconvincing to me: Michael Attaleiates, *Ponema Nomikon*, ed. I. Zepos and P. Zepos, *Jus Graecorum* 7 (Athens 1931) 411-497; Michael Attaleiates, *Diataxis*, ed. P. Gautier in 'La *Diataxis* de Michel Attaliate', *REB* 39 (1989) 5-143, trans. A.-M. Talbot, 'Michael Attaleiates, 'Rule of Michael Attaleiates for his Almshouse in Rhaidestos and for the Monastery of Christ Panoiktirmon in Constantinople', in J.P. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* 1 (Washington, DC 2000) 326-376.

[59] Although the *Chronographia* started with the reign of Basil II in the year 976, this period is abridged in comparison with the attention paid to later emperors; the second part of the *Chronographia* ends on the penultimate reign covered by the *History*; Krallis sustains that Psellos and Attaleiates mostly agree with Psellos' political views up to the end of the first part of the *Chronographia*, and that the two authors distanced in their respective approaches to the subsequent events: Krallis, 'Reader of Psellos'; Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 71-114; I will adopt a more nuanced approach on the matter, advising against reading Attaleiates' *History* as an essential reply to the *Chronographia*, in particular in his account of Michael V Kalaphates and Isaak I Komnenos: see pages 101-105 and 111-118 below.

[60] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, lv-lxiii.

[61] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xl-xli; Kaldellis and Krallis, *The History*, xvii-xviii.

prooimion and additional materials.[62] The text of the *History* concludes by promising that new material would follow, which scholars consider as a proof of the account's incomplete status. It has also served as a *post-quem* clue for Attaleiates' death, as he was unable to (or at any rate did not) fit the ascension of Alexios I Komnenos to the throne only two years after the last dated event in the *History*.[63]

The *History* has attracted the attention of scholars mostly as a privileged historical source on matters such as the campaigns of Romanos IV Diogenes, the disaster at Manzikert and the Seljuq invasion of Anatolia, and the economic policies of Michael VII Doukas and his minister Nikephoritzes.[64] Recently, scholars began to analyse the *History* as a piece of literature. [65] The first lengthy analysis on the political discourse and argument of the *History* was Alexander Kazhdan's 1984 article. This scholar noted the centrality of the author's praise of the contemporary emperor Botaneiates, and analysed the depiction of previous rulers compared with Botaneiates' absolute virtuousness. Kazhdan concluded that Attaleiates' praise for Botaneiates was an uncommon yet sincere and naïve attempt of a member of the

[62] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xxxiv-xli; *History* 3/3.1-4 and 7/6.1-4: Attaleiates signed as *magistros*, *vestes*, and *krites* in the earlier dedication of the work to Botaneiates, while he held the higher dignities of *proedros*, *krites* of the hippodrome and the *velon* in the later *prooimion*.

[63] Kaldellis and Krallis, *The History*, ix; however, the *Chronographia*, Skylitzes' *Continuation* (and to some extent the *Synopsis*), together with the accounts of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene, all posed in their accounts as if they left them finished – that might tell us about the methodology and style expected in the conclusion of eleventh-century historical narratives.

[64] In regards to modern studies of the economical digressions in the *History*: G.I. Bratianu, 'Une expérience d'économie dirigée: le monopole du blé à Byzance au XIe siècle', *Byz* 9 (1937) 643-662; A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge 1989) 236-238; M. Kaplan, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIe siècle: propriété et exploitation du sol* (Paris 1992) 468-470; A. Laiou, 'Exchange and Trade, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries', in A. Laiou (ed.) *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh Through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 2. (Washington, DC 2002) 741-742; I. Pérez Martín, 'El Análisis Económico en la "Historia" de Miguel Ataliates', *Revista de Historiografía* 3 (2005) 174-180; modern scholarly use of the *History* for the purpose of investigating the events preceding and succeeding Manzikert is particularly abundant; just to offer some examples: S. Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh Through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA and London 1971); J.-C. Cheynet, 'Manzikert: un désastre militaire?', *Byz* 50 (1980) 410-438.

[65] Regarding the possible sources of the *History* and its rhetorical figures: M.D. Spadaro, 'La deposizione di Michele VI: un episodio di «concordia discors» fra chiesa e militari', *JÖB*, 37 (1987) 153-171; L.R. Cresci, 'Cadenze narrative e interpretazione critica nell'opera storica di Michele Ataliate', *Revue des études byzantines* 49 (1991) 197-218; L.R. Cresci, 'Anticipazione e possibilità: moduli interpretativi della storia di Michele Attaliata', *Ιταλοελληνικα* 3 (1993) 71-96.

Constantinopolitan bureaucracy to see the salvation of the empire in Botaneiates, a provincial commander, due to his military prowess.[66] Later research has generally distanced its attention from Kazhdan's stance, both in the neat separation between civil and military elites, and in considering Attaleiates' praise to Botaneiates to be a serious matter linked to the rest of the account – particularly concerning the latter issue, we might be heading the wrong way.

Much of what has been discussed about the reception of Psellos applies to the most recent studies of Attaleiates, albeit in the opposite direction. If Psellos' *Chronographia* has been often recognised as extraordinary, the *History* is considered as a little sibling in terms of literary quality and progressiveness of its forms and arguments.[67] Part of this tendency is sustained by the lesser fame and influence Attaleiates had during his career in comparison to Psellos. However, modern negative appreciations of the *History* rise from grounding our expectations on the idealisations of the contemporary *Chronographia*.[68] Furthermore, beyond downplaying the *History* against the *Chronographia*, scholars wishing to vindicate the *History*'s philosophical or literary validity apply the same quality guidelines generated in praise of Psellos. For instance, scholars such as Pérez Martín claimed that some of Attaleiates

[66] A. P. Kazhdan, 'The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', in A. P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984), 23-87.

[67] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, ix: 'De la comparación con la riqueza informativa de Escilitzes o con las alturas retóricas y las profundidades del pensamiento de Pselo, la *Historia* de Miguel Ataliates sale empequeñecida'; L. Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing* (Cambridge 2018) 150 presented the *History* as 'a vital source for eleventh-century history, often offering an enlightening alternative to the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos'.

[68] Especially explicit in this respect has been Iákov Ljubarskij, who noted Attaleiates' 'more traditional' style in depicting characters, even concluding that the former 'was overshadowed' by the latter, and also that, had the *Chronographia* not existed, the *History* would have shone as the most innovative historical account of its time, as it displays a tamed version of the innovations we find in Psellos' account: I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Miguel Ataliates y Miguel Pselo: ensayo de una breve comparación' *Erytheia*, 16 (1995) 85-95; see also I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Sobre la Composición de la Obra de Miguel Ataliates', *Erytheia* 11-12 (1990-1991) 49-54; it is also worth noting how the two historical accounts have been artificially equated in their internal separation between history and *enkomion*, especially; I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Why is the *Alexiad* a Masterpiece of Byzantine Literature?', in J.O. Rosenqvist (ed.), *Λειμών: Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Uppsala 1996) 129; reprinted and expanded in T. Gouma-Peterson (ed.), *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (London 2000) 286: '[The History and the Chronographia] consist of two different parts contrasting in style (in a broad sense of the word), composition, and to some extent even in ideas. While the first parts in both works can, in some respects, be likened to classical histories, the second parts are none other than typical encomia'; Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xliii roughly followed Ljubarskij's distinction between historical and encomiastic sections within the *History*; a different approach can be found in Spadaro, 'La deposizione di Michele VI', esp. 197; for further discussion on the topic, see López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano'.

convoluted statements found their explanation in the author's fear of being accused of 'rationalism' by contemporary authorities. Pérez Martín argues that Attaleiates was a 'man of his time' who could not avoid wondering about the physical causes of natural phenomena, but had to hide this 'rational' approach by alluding to divine intervention and other 'traditional' discursive elements.[69]

More recently, the monographs and collection of articles published by Dimitris Krallis, focused on the *History* and Attaleiates' political thought have consolidated this tendency. Krallis praised Attaleiates, both the Philosopher and the Rhetorician, in a manner that sounds familiar to research on Psellos. Attaleiates is first revealed as an author interested in producing a manifesto against pious yet useless expenses in a wounded empire in need of military investment.[70] Krallis insists in presenting Attaleiates' as a 'serious thinker' who read Classical texts 'carefully'. These ambiguous categories sometimes remain dubious in Krallis' argument, while occasionally seem to indicate that the Byzantine author thought the way modern academics do.[71] Krallis also approaches the *History* as a work responding to the

[69] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xvi-xviii; also in A. Pertusi, *Il pensiero político bizantino* (Bolonia 1990) 133-134; Pérez Martín's distinction between Attaleiates' 'real thoughts' and his 'pious mask' within the *History* resemble the distinction between 'scientific' and 'pietistic' thoughts detected by Krallis, *Imperial decline*, 48.

[70] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 126; D. Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor, Holy Patriarch: A New Reading of the Clash between Emperor Isaakios I Komnenos and Patriarch Michael Keroularios in Attaleiates' *History*', *BSl* 67 (2009) 169-190; Krallis, *Serving Byzantium's Emperors*.

[71] D. Krallis, '"Democratic" Action in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: Michael Attaleiates' "Republicanism" in Context', *Viator* 40.2 (2009) 35 argues that Attaleiates 'thought seriously' about the socio-political evolution of the empire, after reading authors such as Plutarch and Polybius; Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 43 notes that, as Attaleiates contemplated the 'ineffective rule' of Botaneiates, he 'thought hard' on what could lead to the empire's success, pushing his arguments outside of 'the rubric of Christian theology'; on pages 50-51, Krallis argues that, due to recent developments in Byzantine literary production, Attaleiates and his contemporaries had more chances of having a 'hand-on relationship' with classical texts, in contrast with earlier epochs; on page 52, Krallis underlines Attaleiates' 'conscious process of appropriation and adaptation of the past', a process marked, among other elements, by reading books 'cover to cover' and not only for performing exercises of rhetorical imitation; on page 55, Krallis concludes that, due to the aforementioned literary developments, an eleventh-century Byzantine thinker was finally able to read Polybius 'carefully' and conclude on this author's goals 'like modern readers' do nowadays, namely arguing for human causation of historical events and relocating the place of the divine in the state. Overall, Krallis' approach seemingly imported discourses of cultural *Renaissance* into eleventh-century Byzantine intellectuals by pushing the 'dark ages' towards earlier generations and identifying specific modern political and religious thoughts as naturally intuitive in the thinker is surrounded by a relatively intellectual-friendly context (has abandoned the 'dark ages' paradigm) and after 'serious' study of his or her environment; I would like to cite, in response, Bourdieu, *Le sens practique*, 62:

> Sans doute parce qu'il ne connaît et ne reconnaît d'autre pensée que la pensée de "penseur", et qu'il ne peut accorder la dignité humaine sans accorder ce qui lui paraît constitutif de cette dignité,

Chronographia, an assertion that 'implicitly ascribes primacy to Psellos' text, by treating it as the centre of the debate'.[72] According to Krallis, Attaleiates roughly agreed with Psellos' points on the first part of the *Chronographia*, but protested against the court intrigues that precipitated Romanos IV's downfall, in which Psellos was involved.[73] In the manner of Psellos, Krallis portrays Attaleiates as hiding his true thoughts for the sake of self-promotion. These statements that do not match Attaleiates' serious beliefs include, for Krallis, a number of comments on religion, divine intervention, and astrology.[74] The ultimate act of self-promotion is, to Krallis, the praise of Botaneiates: 'a solid work of historical scholarship was enhanced with the addition of a hundred-page-long encomium'.[75] However, we should be wary of taking any of these praises seriously, Krallis argues: while the rule of the already-old Botaneiates was clearly heading towards failure, Attaleiates was seeking attention from the Komnenian family, which were better prepared to rule.[76]

However, Krallis himself wonders why Attaleiates dedicated so little space to the reigns up to Isaak Komnenos in his *History* (forty-five pages in Perez Martín's edition, less than a fifth of the whole account), or why he chose to write about a third of his work as lip service to Botaneiates.[77] While I agree with Krallis' recognition of a number of political arguments within the account,[78] there is also considerable merit in viewing the text as a whole, as did Martin Hinterberger, Lia Raffaella Cresci, Carlotta Amande, and Kazhdan.[79] As we shall see,

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l'ethnologue n'a jamais pu arracher les hommes qu'il étudiait à la barbarie du prélogique qu'en les identifiant aux plus prestigieux de ses collègues, logiciens ou philosophes.

[72] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 79.

[73] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 71-114.

[74] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 214: 'the *History* was Attaleiates' attempt to reach historical truth, but it was also a billboard on which he advertised his skills as a political analyst and prognosticator … There was therefore a twofold utility in the *History*'.

[75] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, xxi.

[76] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 157-168 and 213-228.

[77] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, xxxiv and 80.

[78] For instance, I agree with Krallis in arguing that Attaleiates repeatedly contraposes those characters who safeguard their own interests and those eager to sacrifice themselves for the collective: Krallis, 'Sacred emperor', 175.

[79] M. Hinterberger, 'Φόβω κατασεισθείς: τα πάθη του ανθρώπου και της αυτοκρατορίας στο Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτη: το αιτιολογικό σύστημα ενός ιστοριογράφου του 11ου αιώνα', in V. N. Vlyssidou (ed.), *The Empire in Crisis (?)*

Attaleiates' account is indeed best approached as a homogeneous whole, that rhythmically moves the audience from joy to despair, roughly promoting the same values from cover to cover, and concludes with a sincere applause to the emperor Botaneiates.

2.3. Who is this Skylitzes?

Our third author, John Skylitzes, is the author of the *Synopsis* and its *Continuation*, which are probably the least studied eleventh-century Byzantine historical sources from a literary point of view. Ironically, the *Synopsis* has become, either by itself or as part of the larger compilation by Kedrenos, as the preferential source for modern historians interested in eleventh-century Byzantium.[80] This is because, in contrast to the small number of manuscripts preserved of the *Chronographia* and the *History*, the *Synopsis* has survived in over twenty different manuscripts, written between the twelfth and the sixteenth century.[81] Among these manuscripts we find the famous *Skylitzes Matritensis*: the only surviving illustrated Byzantine historical narrative written in Greek.[82] The *Synopsis* covered the years 811-1057 CE, far longer than the *Chronographia* or the *History*.[83] However, some manuscripts containing the *Synopsis* include supplementary accounts, which expands the time span to 1079 CE. While two manuscripts

Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025-1081) (Athens 2003) 155-167; Cresci, 'Cadenze narrative', 197-218, esp. 197-198; C. Amande, 'L'encomio di Niceforo Botaniate nell'*Historia* di Attaliate: modelli, fonti, suggestioni letterarie', *Serta Historica Antiqua* II (Rome 1989) 265-286; Kazhdan, 'Social Views', 23-87.

[80] E. Strugnell, 'The Representation of the Augustae in John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*', in *Byzantina Australiensia* 16 (2006) 121; C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford 2005) 118; E.-S. Kiapidou, *H* Σύνοψη Ιστοριών *του Ιωάννη Σκυλίτζη και οι πηγές της (811-1057)* (Athens 2010) 32 and 53; Jeffreys, 'Double Helix of Reception'', 19-31.

[81] Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 45; for an analysis of the different manuscripts of the *Synopsis*: I. Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae* Synopsis Historiarum (Berlin and New York NY 1973) xx-xxviii.

[82] Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 28 and 35, analyses the impact of the *Synopsis* in later generations of Byzantine historians, and argues that the *Synopsis* had a relatively wide spread amongst the Byzantine literary circles, which does not exactly mean that it was intended for, or was effectively received by, a broad audience; on the particularities of the different manuscripts conserved, and in particular the *Matritensis* manuscript, see Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 45-48; A. Tselikas (ed.), *Joannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum: Codex Matritensis Graecus Vitr. 26-2, facsimile edition* (Athens 2000); J. Burke, 'The Madrid Skylitzes as an Audio-Visual Experiment', in J. Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006) 137-148; E.N. Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past: The Reception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses* (Cambridge 2015).

[83] Nevertheless, my research will focus primarily on the last section of the *Synopsis*, following to the death of Basil II; for a revision of the sections devoted to Basil II, see Holmes, *Basil II*; the most substantial attempt to analyse the literary qualities of the *Synopsis* as a whole corresponds to Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*.

contain a copy of Attaleiates' *History* after the *Synopsis*, five manuscripts display a distinct account, known as the *Continuation* of Skylitzes or *Skylitzes Continuatus*. The *Continuation* mostly follows Attaleiates' narration after heavy editing, combined with additions from other sources.

We have relatively less information about the context of both the *Synopsis* and its *Continuation*, compared with the *History* and the *Chronographia*. Beyond being used as mines of historical data, a substantial portion of modern scholarly work on these accounts dealt with identifying their author and the possible composition date, yet neither of these topics is either clarified or exempt from controversy nowadays. Concerning the authorship, our departing point is the title of the *Synopsis*. There its author signs as 'John Skylitzes, the *kouropalates* who served as commander-in-chief of the watch'.[84] Werner Seibt's research convincingly connected Skylitzes to John the Thrakesian, a political figure traceable to different positions within the court of Alexios Komnenos, before disappearing from the political scene halfway into the 1090s. The surname 'Skylitzes' jumped into Byzantine history alongside John and appeared later sporadically.[85]

Beyond this first consensus on John Skylitzes' career, scholars disagree on whether or not to attribute the *Continuation* to him as well. Only five manuscripts added the *Continuation*, always without an independent title. While Zonaras mentions the *Continuation*'s description of Isaak Komnenos as the working of Skylitzes, Kedrenos incorporates only the *Synopsis* to his work, but not the *Continuation*.[86] Modern scholars disagree on the matter: some pointed at

[84] *Synopsis* 3.3-5: Ἰωάννου κουροπαλάτου καὶ γεγονότος μεγάλου δρουγγαρίου τῆς βίγλας τοῦ Σκυλίτζη.
[85] W. Seibt, 'Ioannes Skylitzes. Zur Person des Chronisten', *JÖB* 25 (1976) 81-85; see also S. Antoljak, 'Wer könnte eigentlich Johannes Skylitzes sein?', in M. Berza and E. Stănescu (eds.), *Actes du XIVe congrès international des études byzantines (Bucarest, 6–12 septembre 1971)* (Bucharest 1974) 677-682; Holmes, *Basil II*, 80; Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 28-29 regarding the survival of the name Skylitzes across Byzantine history; see also the introduction to the translation of the *Synopsis* written by Jean-Claude Cheynet: J.-C. Cheynet, 'Introduction: John Skylitzes, The Author and His Family', in J. Wortley (ed. and trans.), *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057* (Cambridge 2010) ix-xi
[86] John Zonaras *Epitome* 672-673; Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 28-29.

Skylitzes as the author with more or less reservations, while others present the account as anonymous and essentially independent. I will side with the hypotheses argued by Eudoxos Tsolakis, the *Continuation*'s editor, and other authors specialised in the later sections of the *Synopsis*, such as Catherine Holmes and Jonathan Shepard, who highlighted a number of linguistic equivalences between the two accounts while responding to the arguments separating the *Synopsis* from its *Continuation*.[87] A second debate concerns the date of the accounts. While the *Continuation* has been dated in the early years of Alexios' rule with little debate, scholars such as Eirini-Sophia Kiapidou or Seibt date the *Synopsis* in the decade of the 1070s. In contrast, Holmes and Shepard, among others, suggest the 1090s as the composition date.[88] While Kiapidou points at the closeness of Skylitzes to the last events of the eleventh century, even using the first person in some clauses, Shepard replied that this feature might reflect the language of Skylitzes' sources, and not his own.[89] In other words, what lies at the bottom of

[87] Krumbacher pointed as Skylitzes as the autor, C. de Boor 'Weiteres zur Chronik des Skylitzes', *BZ* 14.2 (1905) 409-467; G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica, Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker* (Berlin 1958 [1942]) 340-341 argued that it was an anonymous, independent work; M.E. Colonna, *Gli storici bizantini dal IV al XV secolo* I (Naples 1956) 116-118 even says that Skylitzes revisited his story and added the continuation; E. Tsolakis, Η Συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ιωάννου Σκυλίτζη (Thessaloniki 1968) 75-95 defended Skylitzes' authorship of the *Continuation* on the grounds of linguistic affinities; also followed by W. Seibt, 'Zur Person', esp. 81; critical with Tsolakis' arguments was P. Speck, 'Review of Eudoxos Th. Tsolakis, Η Συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ιωάννου Σκυλίτζη (Thessaloniki 1968)', *Ελληνικά* 22 (1969) 477-479; also A. Kazhdan's review of the same publication in *Византийский Временник* 32 (1971) 260; others had some reservations on the matter: Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*; F.H. Tinnefeld, *Katgorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie, Von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich 1971) 119; in support of Tsolakis' hypothesis: B. Flusin, 'Re-Writing History: John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in J. Wortley (ed. and trans.), *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057* (Cambridge 2010) xxxi; A. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι*, vol. 3 (Athens 1997), 307-312, Kiapidou disagrees and reinitiates the discussion, but acknowledges the existence of significant linguistic similarities between the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation*, and hypothesises that the continuator may have deliberately copied Skylitzes' style in order to harmonise both accounts: E.S. Kiapidou: 'Η πατρότητα της *Συνέχειας* του Σκυλίτζη και τα προβληματά της, συγκλίσεις και αποκλίσεις από τη *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*', *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 42 (2004-06) 329-362, esp. 333-335; also in Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 48-49; Holmes, *Basil II*, 67-68, 80, 83, 85, 90-91 presents Skylitzes as the possible author; also J. Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto: The Rhetoric of Katakalon Kekaumenos', in T. Shawcross and I. Toth (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond* (Cambridge 2018) 187; an even more recent response to Kiapidou from the editor of the *Continuation* can be found in E.T. Tsolakis, 'Συνέχειας συνέχεια', *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 25 (2015) 115-142.

[88] Among those who postulate that the *Synopsis* was composed in the 1070s we find W. Seibt 'Zur Person', 85; Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 34; on the side of the 1090s for the composition of the *Synopsis*: F. Hirsch, *Byzantinische Studien* (Leipzig 1876) 357-8; also Holmes, *Basil II*, 85-91 and 203; Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', 187; Flusin, 'Re-Writing History', xxxi argues for the 1080s as the moment when Skylitzes might have concluded his *Synopsis*, writing the *Continuation* years, or decades, later.

[89] Holmes, *Basil II*, 183-187, 216-217, 220-224, 228-233, and 236-237; Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', 187 argued in favour of a Komnenian audience for the *Synopsis*; also on page 188 n. 12, Shepard questions Kiapidou's

this and other debates regarding Skylitzes is not a different reading of his sparse biographical data, but the different understandings of the inner workings of the *Synopsis*. When, for instance, the narrator of the *Continuation* disapproves of polygamy or considers the credibility of a given miracle, does that reflect Skylitzes' thoughts and agenda, or are these his sources' opinions?[90]

The scholarly discussions that deal with this range of topics, namely the argument of the *Synopsis* and its *Continuation*, are even fewer.[91] The notoriousness these accounts gathered despite being widely used is not helping either. While the *Synopsis* has been described as an 'unsophisticated literary production … intended for an audience of credulous monks',[92] the *Continuation*'s entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* defines it as a mere 'reworking' of Attaleiates' account.[93] Thus, any puzzling element or apparent internal contradiction in the narrative, such as the use of the first person, can be dismissed as the result of a poor adaptation of the source material.[94] This seems to have discouraged the sort of argument-based research

hypothesis that the use of the first person in the *Synopsis* represents Skylitzes and not the narrator of his sources, and links this detail to his own argument for the existence of a 'Source K' almost copied *verbatim* for the account of the rebellion against Michael VI.

[90] For Skylitzes' approach to polygamy, see note 59 in chapter 1; concerning Skylitzes' position towards the miracle following the death of Isaak I, see pages 287-297.

[91] Kiapidou included a detailed overview on past scholarship regarding the style and argument of Skylitzes' *Synopsis* in her monograph, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 53: it included an unpublished doctoral thesis by S. McGrath, 'A Study of the Social Structure of the Byzantine Aristocracy as Seen through Ioannis Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*' (Washington, DC 1996) [Phil. Diss.]; it is also worth mentioning Kazhdan's comparison between Attaleiates' arguments and those from the *Continuation* as shown in Kazhdan, 'Social views', 23-87; publications of central importance for the eleventh-century section of the *Synopsis* are the monograph of Holmes, *Basil II*, together with the various publications by Jonathan Shepard on the *Synopsis* and its eleventh-century sources: J. Shepard, 'Scylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s and the Role of Catacalon Cecaumenus', *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 11 (1975-1976) 296-311; 'Isaac Comnenus' Coronation Day', *ByzSl* 38 (1977) 22-30; 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian Expedition: Skylitzes' Testimony', *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 14-16 (1977-1979) 145-159; 'A Suspected Source of Scylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*: The Great Catacalon Cecaumenus', *BMGS* 16 (1992) 171-181; also T. Sklavos, 'Moralising History: The Synopsis Historiarum of John Skylitzes' and E. Strugnell 'The Representation of the Augustae', in J. Burke, U. Betka, P. Buckley, R. Scott and A. Stephenson (eds.) *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006) 110–119 and 120-136.

[92] Mentioned by Holmes, *Basil II*, 76, concerning the works of Hirsch, *Byzantinische Studien*, 358-376; K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinien bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527-1453)* (Munich 1897); Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 335-341.

[93] A.P. Kazhdan, 'Skylitzes Continuatus', in A. Kazhdan (ed.), *ODB*, vol. 3 (Oxford 1991) 1914.

[94] For instance, the use of the first person singular in the eleventh-century section of the *Synopsis* has been discussed as a clue (or not) for its immediate social context: Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 132-133 and 461-463; Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', 188 n. 12.

we find in the case of the *Chronographia* and the *History*.[95] A number of elements within the accounts seem to point in a different direction than the 'classicising' accounts of Psellos and Attaleiates. Both the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation* work as edited, mildly abridged collections of previous sources. This composite character is explicitly alluded in the title of the *Synopsis* itself, and is explained in its *prooimion*. There, Skylitzes presents his work as a summary of previous sources, from which he claims to have removed 'all comments of a subjective or fanciful nature', plus other contradictions and elements that tended towards fantasy.[96] Skylitzes' editorial manoeuvres are easy to pinpoint when he is using a source that we possess. For instance, while the *Life of Basil I* included a detailed list of Danielis' presents to the emperor Basil I, which are reminiscent of the presents sent to the biblical king Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, Skylitzes interrupted his copying of the source and removed the description of the presents, arguing that enumerating them would go against good taste.[97]

Therefore, some scholars argued that the *Synopsis* mostly constitutes a collection of lightly-edited, pre-existing accounts. From this perspective, Skylitzes would offer little of his personal voice in his account.[98] Further studies have led to the detection of unknown sources

[95] A. Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques à l'époque macédonienne', 59 argued for avoiding neat divisions between accounts such as Skylitzes' *Synopsis* and the 'classicising' histories by Psellos and Attaleiates; also discussed in P. Agapitos 'Grammar, Genre and Patronage in the Twelfth Century: a Scientific Paradigm and its Implications', *JÖB* 64 (2014) 1-4; P. Agapitos, 'Karl Krumbacher and the History of Byzantine Literature', *BZ* 108 (2015) 1-52; and P. Agapitos, 'Contesting Conceptual Boundaries: Byzantine Literature and its History', *Interfaces* 1 (2015) 62-91; see also J. Signes Codoñer, 'Dates or Narrative? Looking for Structures in Middle Byzantine Historiography (9th to 11th century)', in E. Juhász (ed.) *Byzanz und das Abendland IV. Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia* (Budapest 2016) 227-256, esp. 250-253.

[96] *Synopsis* 4.44-59: τὰς τῶν ἄνωθεν λεχθέντων συγγραφέων ἐπ' ἀκριβὲς ἱστορίας ἀναλεξάμενοι καὶ τὰ ἐμπαθῶς ἢ καὶ πρὸς χάριν λεχθέντα ἀποδιοπομπήσαντες καὶ τὰς διαφορὰς καὶ διαφωνίας παρέντες, ἀποξέσαντες δὲ καὶ ὅσα ἐγγὺς ἐρχόμενα εὕρομεν τοῦ μυθώδους, τὰ δὲ εἰκότα καὶ ὁπόσα μὴ τοῦ πιθανοῦ ἀπέπιπτε συλλεξάμενοι, προσθέντες δὲ καὶ ὁπόσα ἀγράφως ἐκ παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐδιδάχθημεν; Skylitzes mentions Psellos among the sources who fail to portray past events with enough accuracy, possibly as a reference to his *Historia Syntomos* instead of the *Chronographia*: Kiapidou, *H Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 38-39.

[97] *Life of Basil I* 74; *Synopsis* 161.91-92; P. Magdalino and R. S. Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC 2010); on the Queen of Sheba, see I. Anagnostakis and A. Kaldellis, 'The Textual Sources for the Peloponnese, A.D. 582-959: Their Creative Engagement with Ancient Literature', *GRBS* 54 (2014) esp.115-123.

[98] I. Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Berlin and New York, NY 1973) viii; Sklavos, 'Moralising History', 110 described the *Synopsis* as 'essentially a compilation of sources – a selection of which the author has sifted through, assessed, and allocated as true for his history'; then he argued that 'the chronicle is a moralising

within the two accounts. Particularly in the case of Skylitzes' coverage of the eleventh century, the contributions of Shepard are of utmost importance. Shepard focused his research on a hypothetical *enkomion* for Georgios Maniakes and, more recently, on a suspected 'Source K' present in the *Synopsis* from the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos up to the end of the account. 'Source K', Shepard argued, was originally intended as a manifesto written or supervised by the general Katakalon Kekaumenos, dealing with his military achievements. Kekaumenos, Shepard argued, attempted to justify his political actions and to show discontent for his marginalisation from politics during the reign of Isaak Komnenos and his successor Constantine Doukas. Shepard read the discontent expressed towards Isaak in the 'Source K' as a clear reflection of Kekaumenos' point of view, and also a proof of Skylitzes' soft editing of his sources. As a result of incorporating Kekaumenos' words *verbatim*, the *Synopsis* criticised Isaak while living under the reign of his nephew Alexios – a risky situation for Skylitzes to say the least.[99] In sum, Shepard describes Skylitzes as a relatively poor editor whose reliability decreases when he (unsuccessfully) deals with sources from different literary genres that contain different arguments.[100] Angeliki Laiou claimed to have detected another specific source inside the *Synopsis*. The now-lost account supposedly covered the reigns of Romanos III and Michael IV. Laiou proposed Demetrios of Kyzikos, an intellectual at the court of Constantine VIII, mentioned by Skylitzes in his *prooimion* as one of his sources. Although the evidence

history with an underlying idea of reciprocity between the imperial and divine realms', but concluded on page 119 that it is 'difficult to conclude on a chronicle that is 'essentially a compilation of other sources'.

[99] Concerning the *enkomion* to Maniakes, see Shepard, 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian Expedition', 155-158; on the 'source K': 'A Suspected Source', esp. 176, where Shepard wonders why Skylitzes defends so vehemently characters from another generation such as Katakalon Kekaumenos; a more recent and updated reading of 'Source K' can be found in Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', esp. 187 and 200-201; Shepard also reads the account of Isaak's rebellion as potentially pro-Komnenian in Shepard, 'Suspected source', 177; but underlines the source's harshness towards Isaak in Shepard, 'Memoirs as manifesto', 188.

[100] Concerning Skylitzes' incapacity to compose a fully coherent narrative by mixing different materials: Shepard, 'Last Sicilian Expedition' 146-7; Holmes noted similar chronological problems of the same sort for Skylitzes' coverage of the reign of Basil II: Holmes, *Basil II*, 101-116.

provided by Laiou cannot be conclusive, it shows how the *Synopsis* can be regarded as a mosaic of pre-existent accounts, each of them containing their own viewpoint.[101]

Approaching Skylitzes' work from that angle can lead towards over-relying on the accounts' impartiality, taking what it says as an essentially reasonable edition of the materials.[102] However, even Shepard and Laiou occasionally identified some sort of authorial voice in the works of Skylitzes. That leads to a similar set of problems to those mentioned in the previous sections, concerning modern narratives of authorial originality and the allocation of Skylitzes' views in modern 'secularist' discourses.[103] In particular, Kiapidou's monograph, focused on the source material from the whole *Synopsis*, assumes that Skylitzes executed a significant edition of his materials as he described the more recent events that followed the death of Basil II. Skylitzes, according to Kiapidou, adopted a 'very personal prism' (ἕνα προσωπικὸ πλέον πρίσμα) towards episodes such as the downfall of Michael V, and added autobiographic elements to later passages.[104] It is through this authorial voice, Kiapidou argues,

[101] Laiou 'Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes', *DOP* 46 (1992) 165-176: Laiou links Skylitzes' source to Demetrios after considering their opinion on imperial marriages, their criticism towards the patriarch Alexios Stoudites, and their sympathy for metropolitans who were elevated to the rank of *synkellos*, as was the case of Demetrios; A. Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*. *Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia, PA 2013) 97 also claims that Skylitzes might have had a reliable source for the origin of the Turks, since Attaleiates did not cover the affair with the same degree of accuracy; for an overview on the possible historical sources available for a Byzantine historian at the beginning of the eleventh century: A. Markopoulos, 'Byzantine History Writing at the End of the First Millennium', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *Byzantium in the Year 1000* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2003) 183-197; the *Synopsis* definitely does not contain any direct quotation from either Psellos or Attaleiates, contrary to the *Continuation*, as noted by Kiapidou, *Η Συνόψη Ιστοριών,* 122-124.

[102] A. Kaldellis, 'The Manufacture of History', esp. 304: 'Skylitzes is a great resource because he contains a large amount of information stripped of narrative context and rhetorical elaboration …. To be sure, this information may have its origin in unreliable prior sources, thereby shifting the problem over to them, but I doubt this vitiates even a majority of it, as a lot of what Skylitzes reports if fairly banal, lacking elaboration and some of it can be confirmed by foreign sources'.

[103] Laiou 'Imperial marriages', esp. 171-172, also argued for a common moral stand concerning adultery in both the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation*, different from that of authors such as Psellos; Laiou's remarks about Skylitzes' approach towards ecclesiastic dogma have also been referred in the note 59 from chapter 1 above; Flusin, 'Re-Writing History', xxi and xxiii; Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', 204 understands that Skylitzes must have added some input to the argument from 'Source K', since it coincides with the morality reflected in the rest of the *Synopsis*; concerning the *Continuation*, Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 93 argues that Skylitzes must have followed the debates around Romanos Diogenes' campaigns and ultimate downfall, considering his small but significant editions on the accounts of Attaleiates and Psellos and, in particular, given his particular dislike for Psellos' political role: *Continuation* 171.6-10.

[104] Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 116.

that Skylitzes kept some internal coherence and authorial voice, something that helps her to mark Skylitzes' position on the eleventh-century historiographical production alongside Attaleiates and Psellos.[105] However, despite the greater attraction of the style of Psellos and Attaleiates to our own ears, Skylitzes did not necessarily want to be associated with their style.

Holmes adopted an interesting middle ground. She advises caution in assuming that Skylitzes 'was merely a passive copyist and abbreviator whose testimony can be accepted as accurate transmission' of his sources.[106] Similarly, she looked for discreet authorial practices in the *Synopsis*' coverage of the reign of Basil II. Holmes detected how Skylitzes inserted additional data, homogenised his report of military events, eliminated minor characters, or played with the titles ascribed to the individuals mentioned in the narrative.[107] Her hypothesis is that Skylitzes aimed to portray the events surrounding the emperor Basil II in a manner that could be read as some sort of discreet propaganda in favour of Alexios Komnenos' own policies. Holmes looked for evidence other than direct pronouncements from the narrator. Skylitzes paid special attention to Basil's wars in the west, and highlighted the role of characters whose lineage could be traced back to the powerful families of the late eleventh-century – the very families Alexios was trying to win to his cause. Thus, Holmes argues that the *Synopsis*, a 'who's who' from Alexios' time, portrays Basil II not as an autocrat, but rather as a leader whose victory depended of the collaboration of other aristocrats. Portraying historical events that way might be expected to encourage a similar unity under Alexios' rule.[108] A reading of other sections of the *Synopsis* seem to confirm Holmes' argument.[109]

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[105] Kiapidou, *Η Συνοψη Ιστοριών*, 116-117 and 123.
[106] Holmes, *Basil II*, 130.
[107] Holmes, *Basil II*, 125-149; see also C. Holmes, 'The Rhetorical Structures of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 187-200, esp. 187: 'the most fruitful way of utilizing Skylitzes' testimony lies in trying to understand his principles of selection, presentation, and interpretation rather than in verifying the facts that he transmits'.
[108] Holmes, *Basil II*, 183-238, esp. 222, 228, 230 and 238.
[109] See, in particular, pages 134-144 below; concerning earlier sections of the *Synopsis*, the account on the reign of Leo VI reflects a positive approach towards members of the Doukas and Argyros families; A. Kaldellis, *Streams*

My perspective is closer to Holmes' rather than Kiapidou's. I will analyse how Skylitzes' authorial practices in his narration of the events that followed the death of Basil II derived from his selection of the sources and from a careful use of his materials. Similarly to scholars such as Theoni Sklavos, I will approach the *Synopsis* and its *Continuation* as two accounts that subtly supported certain morals or codes of behaviour.[110] Alongside Holmes' thesis, my approach will situate the praise of the Komnenian family among Skylitzes' authorial goals. Skylitzes pushed his agenda under a well-crafted guise of impartiality, dealing with contemporary maxima of historical rigour differently than Psellos or Attaleiates.[111]

2.4. Who is listening? Narratees and audience

Although the Byzantine audience has often constituted the less famous side of the transmission between those composing a story and those reading or listening it, their role is fundamental: effective communication does not exist if there is nobody to receive what is being told. When composing a narration, the author, by virtue of the principle of inter-subjectivity, is fundamentally responding to the expectations of an imagined, expected, or model audience, which may coincide in a variable degree with the individuals that will later read or listen.[112] In words of Umberto Eco, 'the model author and the model reader are entities that become clear to each other only in the process of reading, so that one creates the other'. Eco defines the 'model author' of a given narrative as the author's attempt to make the audience read the narrative the way preferred by the author, that is to say, to transform the 'empirical reader' into

of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade (New York, NY and Oxford 2017) 155 noted that Skylitzes could be using a pro-Komnenos source in his account of Constantine VIII's reign, since it portrays Nikephoros Komnenos being unjustly punished by the emperor.

[110] Sklavos, 'Moralising History', 110-119.

[111] F. Bernard, 'Authorial Practices and Competitive Performance in the Works of Michael Psellos', in M.D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow, M. (eds.), *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017) 32 uses the term 'authorial practices', described as 'all forms by which people engaged in the composition or improvisation of texts or speeches, without necessarily implying that these authors intended to play a part in literary history'; on page 59, Bernard argued that, rather than existing a two-fold choice between self-promotion and modesty for Byzantine authors, they created various middle grounds in practice.

[112] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 61.

a ‘model reader’; meanwhile, he defines the model reader as nothing but the ‘will and ability to adapt to this style [marked by the model author], cooperating to making it possible’.[113] Thus, author and audience are intertwined. Knowledge about a given narrative’s potential audience shapes our reading of the sources – for instance, it is only because Holmes suspected that the members of the Komnenian family constituted a key section from Skylitzes’ intended audience, that she was able to explain why Skylitzes depicted Basil II the way he did it.[114] Holmes grounds her reading of the *Synopsis* from her knowledge and expectations on the narrative’s intended audience, as tends to be the case in the rest of the Byzantine accounts one way or another.[115]

Therefore, bringing some preliminary information on our accounts’ audience becomes of outmost importance. Unfortunately, we neither have as many clues on the audience’s identity and role in our accounts’ creative process as of some of our authors, nor has the topic received in-depth scholarly attention. Research on the audience, or readership, of Byzantine literary works constitutes a relatively recent field.[116] Pioneering scholars such as Margaret Mullett complained of their peers’ lack of attention on the matter, up to the point that some assumed that there was no Byzantine audience as such, or that the people capable to comprehend Byzantine ‘secular literature’ was reduced to a small group of *literati*.[117] More recently, scholars such as Athanasios Markopoulos have argued for a larger number of possible readers and listeners to Byzantine historical accounts, while conceding that each sector of the audience,

[113] U. Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, MA and London 1994) 24-25.
[114] See page 71 above.
[115] A similar case, concerning an historical account relatively contemporary to Skylitzes’, is Neville’s analysis of Nikephoros Bryennios’ *Material for History*: L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. The* Material for History *of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge, 2012).
[116] A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, DC 1982) 102 defined the topic as understudied at his time; among the studies on the matter that preceded Kazhdan’s: H.G. Beck, *Das literarische Schaffen der Byzantiner: Wege zu seinem Verständnis* (Vienna 1973); for an early approach to the Byzantine *theatra*: H. Hunger, *Reich der neuen Mitte. Der christliche Geist der byzantinischen Kultur* (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne 1965), esp. 341.
[117] M. Mullett, ‘Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople’, in M. Angold (ed.) *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII centuries* (Oxford 1984) 173; in reference to P. Lemerle, *Prolegomènes à une edition critique et commentée des ‘Conseils et Récits’ de Kekauménos* (Brussels 1960) 95: ‘littérature sans public et sans problems’; R. Jenkins, ‘The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Literature’, *DOP* 17 (1963) 40: ‘no secular literature was written for a wide public, since no such public existed’.

depending on their knowledge and position, understood the narrative differently.[118] From the decade of the 1980s onwards, several publications deepened our knowledge of the middle Byzantine historiographical audience,[119] with special attention to Byzantine patronage, literary circles, or the celebration of literary gatherings (usually referred as *theatra*).[120] Our lack of data concerning the historiographical audience has been, to an extent, compensated with information from comparison with other literary genres, such as hagiography or poetry.[121] Scholars such as Markopoulos have also questioned the traditional division between two kinds of historical accounts directed to two distinct audiences (classicising history destined for literate elites opposed to chronicles written by and for individuals displaying a lower education level).[122]

The picture we now have of the audience of the eleventh-century Byzantine historical accounts is sharper than in previous decades, but it nevertheless derives from broad generalisations based on the sparse data. We can argue, for example, that our texts were

[118] Markopoulos replied to Lemerle's low estimates of Byzantine readers in A. Markopoulos, 'De la structure de l'école byzantine. Le maitre, les livres et les processus éducativ, in B. Mondrain (ed.), *Lire et écrire à Byzance: XXe Congrès international des études byzantines, 19-25 août 2001* (Paris 2006) 85-96, here 87; also A. Markopoulos 'Teacher and Textbooks in Byzantium, Ninth to Eleventh Centuries', in S. Steckel, N. Gaul and M. Grünbart (eds.) *Networks of Learning: Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000-1200* (Zurich and Münster 2014) 3-15, here 6-7 n. 16.

[119] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 69; G. Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance* (Paris 2006) 92-95; B. Croke, 'Uncovering Byzantium's Historiographical Audience', in R. Macrides (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium. Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007* (Farnham 2010) 25–53, here 28 and 33; C. Roueché, 'The Rhetoric of Kekaumenos', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 24-25: although Kekaumenos is seemingly addressing his own son in his *Strategikon*, it has been deduced, by attending to generic convention and to the social context of the work, that the intended readership of his treatise was much wider.

[120] Mullett 'Aristocracy and Patronage', 174-180; Agapitos, 'Grammar, Genre and Patronage', 1-22; E. Jeffreys, 'The Sevastokratorissa Eirene as Literary Patroness: The Monk Iakovos', *JÖB* 32.3 (1982) 63-71.

[121] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 56; Croke, 'Uncovering Byzantium's Historiographical Audience', 29-30; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 55-57; Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance*, 14-21, 47-55 and 55-66, and 92-95; the situation of the Byzantine historical accounts is, in this respect, comparable to hagiographies, which were frequently read aloud: S. Efthymiadis and N. Kalogeras, 'Audience, Language and Patronage in Byzantine Hagiography' in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 2 (Farnham 2014) 248-284, esp. 250-251 and 253; C. Rapp, 'Author, Audience, Text, and Saint: Two Modes of Early Byzantine Hagiography', *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1 (2015) 111-129; concerning poetry, see F. Bernard (ed.), *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025-1081* (Oxford 2014).

[122] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 59-62; Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, 219-221 presented chronicles as written by and for individuals displaying a lower education level.

expected to receive attention, primarily, from elite members in Constantinople. The audience probably included members of the imperial family, court dwellers from a diverse background, and also other kind of officials and members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy.[123] No clear answer responds to whether our narratives were primarily performed orally or were expected to be, above all, read in relative silence and isolation: the terms used for 'reading' and 'listening' overlap in their meanings, and the contexts we are able to reconstruct suggest a combination of both. Part, if not most, of Attaleiates' *History* was read aloud as an occasion to celebrate the rule of his patron Botaneiates. Certain clues from Psellos' *Chronographia*, such as allusions to 'readers' and 'listeners', suggest a mixture of both among the intended audience.[124]

The manner in which the interests of our authors converged with the social and ruling elites, people who contributed to the formers' economic sustainability and good reputation, requires special attention.[125] Scholars such as Kazhdan, Luisa Andriollo, and Markopoulos pointed at the proliferation of a relatively new kind of historical works from the tenth century onwards, derived from the social composition of the Byzantine society. These histories revolved around biographies of either aristocrats or whole lineages, and possibly aimed at an audience formed by, though not limited to, the (real or imaginary) relatives of the protagonists.[126] These accounts would include some of the aforementioned sources for

[123] Croke, 'Uncovering Byzantium's Historiographical Audience', esp. 32-50 and 53.

[124] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 53-54, brings earlier examples to compare: Theophanes and his Continuator addressed 'readers' while Genesios addressed an 'audience': Theophanes, *Chronography*, I.4, 15-21; Continuation of Theophanes VI 427.15-428.2; Genesios, *On the Reigns of Emperors*, 58, 4-5; from a later period, Niketas Choniates declares that a public reading of his account will take place: Niketas Choniates, *History* 1.2.25-27; Psellos' implies the potential existence of private readers in *Chronographia* 6.134 and 7c.13.

[125] Mullett, 'Aristocracy and Patronage', 173; Kazhdan, 'Social Views'.

[126] A. Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', esp. 69:

> Nous nous trouvons ainsi devant une nouvelle réalité dans l'écriture de l'historiographie byzantine, qui suggère manifestement que la tendance anthropocentrique, visible à la même période dans des contextes culturels variés, suscite un intérêt plus général et a manifestement, soulignons-le, un public en quête d'œuvres de cette nature, qui désire les lire ou les écouter s'il ne dispose pas de la culture suffisante. Je pensé que nombre de ces œuvres ont plutôt un caractère conjoncturel et sont indubitablement destinées au public contemporain.

Also in A. Markopoulos, 'From Narrative Historiography to Historical Biography: New Trends in Byzantine Historical Writing in the 10th-11th Centuries', *BZ* 102 (2009) 697-715, here 713-714; 'chivalresque historiography' according to A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850-1000)* (Athens 2006) 273-294;

Skylitzes' account on the eleventh century, and would contribute to explain the combination of history and *enkomion* in Attaleiates' *History*. It may also allow us to gaze at the audience's expectations to the *Chronographia*: although the biographical scope adopted by Psellos in his account surprises modern scholars when comparing it to former and contemporary historical narratives, his audience was probably familiar with the intersection between history and biography.[127]

These changes in the creation and reception of historical accounts relates to the concept of 'occasional literature', recently explored by Ingela Nilsson in her article on the works of the twelfth-century author Constantine Manasses. Nilsson's concept designates 'literature with an extraliterary end', focused on the author's expectations to receive a commission either as a direct or indirect, long-term result of his work. Nilsson brings Claudio Annibaldi's research on musical patronage during the early Modern period as an example of the multi-folded relation between patron and author. According to Annibaldi, the patron, by listening to a musical piece commended by him or her – or an historical account, as Nilsson suggests – not only demonstrates his or her power to promote the arts, but also proved his or her 'artistic sensibility and connoisseurship', what Pierre Bourdieu would label as 'distinction'.[128]

Precisely because of this, we may wonder to what extent we should consider the few references to the Byzantine audience in our accounts to be accurate. Nilsson also cited James Zetzel's commentaries on representations of the audience in different narratives as to argue

L. Andriollo, 'Aristocracy and Literary Production in the 10th Century', in A. Pizzone (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature* (Boston, MA and Berlin 2014) 119-138, esp. 126-131; an example of the construction of ancestries for political purposes in eleventh-century Byzantium, see N. Leidholm, 'Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades, and the Fabii: Embellished Genealogies and Contested Kinship in Eleventh-Century Byzantium', *BMGS* 42.3 (2018) 185-201.

[127] Certainly Markopoulos ranked Psellos' *Historia Syntomos* as paradigmatic of the frequent absorption of elements from the biographic genre into other middle Byzantine historical accounts, as a result of the authors' relation with their social environment: Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 68.

[128] C. Annibaldi, 'Towards a Theory of Musical Patronage in the Renaissance and Baroque: The Perspective from Anthropology and Semiotics', *Recercare* 10 (1998) 173–82, esp. 174-176; see also C. Annibaldi, *La musica e il mondo: mecenatismo e committenza musicale in Italia tra Quattro e Settecento* (Bologna 1993); P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. R. Nice (London and New York, NY 2010 [1984]).

that these are as 'fictional' as the self-representation of narrators themselves.[129] For instance, researchers tend to be, at least, partially aware of the difference between the 'historical' Psellos and the image of himself portrayed in his works. However, due to the lack of further data on the matter, scholars such as Markopoulos offered excessive credibility to Psellos' depiction of his audience of his texts, where the author distinguished among different groups, namely the most educated περιττοί ('extraordinary' or 'remarkable' people) who thoroughly absorbed the themes and ideas from the text, the σπουδαῖοι ('earnest' or 'serious' people) who struggled to decipher the whole message, and those with a fallible level of education.[130] However, Psellos' allusion to different kinds of audience do not necessarily imply anything deeper than the recognition that people with lower knowledge of philosophy and rhetoric may not receive the whole message. If anything, Psellos' words could be framed as a strategical interaction with the audience. Recalling Eco's distinction between model author and model audience, Psellos' words constitute an authoritative call to its audience to assimilate themselves with the figure of the model audience – some are already assimilated, others are getting there after some effort, and there are those who seem hopeless. Following Annibaldi's argument, Psellos' words may also constitute a reward for members of the audience who understand Psellos' argument by distinguishing them from the rest. He thus awarded the section of the audience that was capable to fit in the more positive categories with cultural distinction. Psellos' depiction of his intended audience related to the author's own thoughts and aims, a matter Zetzel advised to be wary of. Likewise, in his dedication of the *History* to Nikephoros III Botaneiates, Attaleiates constructed an image of his main patron that carefully moved its focus from the military prestige acknowledged in other accounts about the man, to Botaneiates' otherwise unknown literary endeavours. He slowly directed the audience's attention from the mainstream portrait of his

[129] Nilsson, 'The Literary Imaginary of the Past'; J.E.G. Zetzel, 'The Poetics of Patronage in the Late First Century', in B.K. Gold (ed.) *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, TX 1982) 87-102.
[130] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 56-57 and 72; Psellos' words are extracted from his eulogy to Symeon Metaphrastes, in Michael Psellos, *Orationes Hagiographicae* 280-281.

patron up to a point where the patron would be compelled to pay Attaleiates due respect as a fellow literary man.[131]

Therefore, we do not only lack of direct information on our accounts' audience, but we must digest what little information we have with some scepticism. Solutions on the identity of our account's intended audience may come from two groups of answers: a more general scope based on our knowledge on the middle Byzantine readership and audience of different literary genres, and a more localised study of the accounts' influence over other works. The former group may help us in envisioning a wide audience for our accounts: intellectuals and court members of every kind, in addition to Psellos' own students, might have heard or read sections of the *Chronographia*, an account which, according to Psellos himself, originated in the suggestions of his fellow intellectuals in general, and Constantine Leichoudes in particular.[132] The fact that the *Chronographia* survives in one manuscript only may not be related to a general lack of interest among the intended audience to the text, but of the later readers choosing other materials over his for their own reasons, such as copying historical accounts encompassing wider periods of time.[133] As Reinsch recently demonstrated, the *Chronographia* had a remarkable impact in the work of historians from later generations, from the *History* of Attaleiates onwards. These historians not only copied Psellos' expressions, but, occasionally (as in the particular case of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*) Psellos' overall style in depicting his narratives' characters and himself.[134] Similar ideas apply to Attaleiates' *History*, an account most likely read to a wide court audience, and later conserved, at least, in the monastery

[131] F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'A Narrative Approach on the Dedication of Michael Attaleiates' *History* to the Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates', in A. Theodoraki (ed.), *Πρακτικά 9ου Συνεδρίου Μεταπτυχιακών Φοιτητών και Υποψηφίων Διδακτόρων του Τμήματος Φιλολογίας. Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθήνων 4-7 Οκτωβρίου 2017: Βυζαντινή Φιλολογία* (Athens 2018) 62-85.
[132] Reinsch: 'Wer waren die Leser'.
[133] Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques', 70-71.
[134] Reinsch: 'Wer waren die Leser'; on Anna Komnene's reception of Psellos, see L. Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (New York, NY 2016) 68; see also L. O. Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene's Alexiad: Emergence of a Personal History* (Amsterdam 2019) 35-36 and 43-69.

founded by Attaleiates himself.[135] The *History* partially fits Nilsson's category of 'occasional literature' inasmuch as it explicitly combines the generic rules of history and a final *enkomion* of Attaleiates' patron. The *History* probably lost some favour from possible readers amongst the ruling elite once Alexios Komnenos dethroned Botaneiates.[136]

In opposition to the two earlier accounts, the *Synopsis* of Skylitzes is one of the best conserved Byzantine historical accounts. On the one hand, studies of the different manuscripts have provided valuable information on the ways and contexts the *Synopsis* had been read aloud decades after its completion.[137] On the other hand, contributions such as Shepard's attempted to reconstruct the context surrounding the different accounts Skylitzes was using for composing the *Synopsis*.[138] Our account stands in the middle. One can presuppose Skylitzes did not have in mind an audience very different from that of Psellos and Attaleiates, if only the style of the work reduced the occasional aspect of the work and detached it from the particular circumstances of recent events and the life of Skylitzes himself – it was certainly favoured by such style when it was reproduced by later generations. Holmes noted how Skylitzes' pursuit for conciseness and clarity, though associated with the elimination of data deemed as valuable by modern historians, possibly was received by his audience positively.[139]

Our information concerning our accounts' audience is, one way or another, incomplete – and yet it should not be ignored. In the following chapters I will conceive the accounts as produced by our authors for a certain intended audience, whose empirical existence can be traced back to the information discussed above. Whatever happened to our authors and the society they lived in after the publication of their works, resulting in innovative readings of

[135] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 45-52.
[136] Nilsson, 'The Literary Imaginary of the Past'.
[137] The *Skylitzes Matritensis* manuscript has been approached from the perspective of its qualities enhancing an aural reading: Burke, 'The Madrid Skylitzes', 145-146.
[138] Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto'; see also pages 64-72 above.
[139] Holmes, 'Rhetorical Structures', 194-199.

their narratives, is one thing; the authors' expectations and self-justifications in writing their accounts, embedded in the habits and social dynamics of the time of composition, is another.

3. The emperor under a spotlight: prominent characters in the sources

As mentioned in our analysis of *TBR* above, Anthony Kaldellis suggested focusing on the information provided in the historical accounts to achieve a better understanding of Byzantine political ideology beyond encomiastic praise to the divinely-appointed emperor.[1] The omnipresence of the male rulers in the historical accounts, a sort of 'elephant in the room', has received less attention, considering it a tradition, or even a way to please an imperial patron. Meanwhile, scholars have increasingly focused in the exceptional sections of the narratives where other characters, namely empresses, noble men and women, or even non-aristocrats, gained some prominence.[2] Subverting Kaldellis' argument, I will argue that misrepresentations of the Byzantine political thought have risen precisely from our excessive focus on the sections from our sources that are not devoted to describing the ruler. Through this lens, elements such as the prominence of the mob in Attaleiates' *History* has been argued as the author's innovative realisation of popular-based 'republican' power.[3] Likewise, ignoring the *a priori* male-centeredness of the narratives may lead to misinterpretations on the role of the female characters, the few moments they enter the scene.[4]

The emperor's central position in our accounts should not be disregarded as a stylistic matter detached from the book's argument. In the words of Irene De Jong:

> According to some narratologists, narratives without focalization can exist. Events would be merely 'filmed', without the presence of someone who sees. As the

[1] A. Kaldellis, *TBR*, 6; see pages 20-35 in chapter 1.
[2] A. Kaldellis and D. Krallis (tr.), *The History: Michael Attaleiates* (Cambridge, MA and London 2012) xv; S. Tougher, 'Introduction', in S. Tougher (ed.), *The Emperor in the Byzantine World: Papers from the Forty-Seventh Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (New York, NY and Oxford 2019) 1-10; see also Kaldellis, *TBR*, 95.
[3] D. Krallis, '"Democratic" Action in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: Michael Attaleiates' "Republicanism" in Context', *Viator* 40.2 (2009) 35-53.
[4] L. Brubaker, 'Sex, lies and Textuality: The Secret History of Prokopios and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium', in L. Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith (eds.) *Gender in the Early Medieval world, East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge 2004) 83-101.

> metaphor of the film makes clear, however, this claim cannot be true: even 'filming' always implies a camera angle and distance, in other words a form of mediation and hence filtering of events. Thus it is the assumption of this book that narration always entails focalization.[5]

This means approaching our sources' focus on the imperial persona as more than a literary convention; as a narrative pillar used by our authors to construct their own arguments. Even if we accept that the narrative focus on the emperor derived from a long, largely unconscious tradition, it is still relevant for the story crafted by the narrator, the values conveyed in it, and the wider topic of Byzantine political discourse. Thus, this chapter will explore the impact of the emperor's presence within the narrative and its potential exceptions: is there really a moment when the emperor is not under the spotlight?

3.1. The emperor at the centre

As the elephant in the room has been spotted, let us measure it and find out to which species it belongs. Both Kaldellis and Frederick Lauritzen argued that, in his *Chronographia*, Psellos focused on presenting different emperors, analysing their character, and then showing how their character were related to their decisions and their consequences.[6] As will be discussed below, Psellos connected the *ethos* and the flaws of each emperor to the description and resolution of historical events. In Psellos' own words, 'no one is completely incorruptible, but each one is characterised by what predominates in them'.[7] This focus on the imperial persona

[5] I.J.F. de Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford 2014) 47; also on narrative focalisation H. White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD 1987) ix: 'the narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form … but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications'; a more detailed description of narrative focalisation will unfold in chapter 6, bringing along the concepts of 'fabula', 'story', and 'text' on pages 245-250.
[6] F. Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character in the Chronographia of Michael Psellos* (Turnhout 2013) 33-56 and 125-131; For Lauritzen, Psellos' depiction of different emperors can be seen as the description of the emperor's unique character at the beginning of the narrative, followed by the opposition of this character by various events, enemies, and other phenomena: Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character*, 70-71; similarly, Kaldellis argues that, in the Chronographia, the actions of men and women, and the policies of emperors and empresses 'are the natural products of their innate character, their particular natures as individual human beings': A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Michael Psellos'* Chronographia (Boston, MA 1999) 23.
[7] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.26.9-11: ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐδείς ἐστι τῶν πάντων ἀνάλωτος· ἀλλ' ὁ χαρακτὴρ ἑκάστῳ ἀπὸ τοῦ πλείονος; I have changed Sewter's translation of ἀνάλωτος from 'free from guilt' to 'incorruptible' in order to emphasise Psellos' emphasis on the gradual corruption of the bodies; see pages 237-245, and 266.

had consequences for the political discourse conveyed in the *Chronographia*, which also influenced modern narratives on the Byzantine past, sometimes unconsciously. Some of the elements in the *Chronographia* that received the praise of modern readers for their 'very human' and even timeless portraits of complex characters, were rooted in the narrator's uneasy attempt to coordinate the character's personal development and particular political events.[8] Psellos combined different literary genres, such as history, biography, *enkomion*, hagiography and other digressions, in order to produce a narrative that allowed him both to explain his view on the politics of the empire and the contribution of each emperor to the current situation, and also to explain and justify his own role as a senior member of the court.[9]

An example of Psellos' work combining character depiction and political events can be found in the third book of the *Chronographia*, dedicated to the reign of Romanos III Argyros (see appendices 1 to 4 for this section).[10] Romanos' story, as recounted by Psellos, was that of an overambitious ruler who had an unrealistic perception of his own capacities. Romanos' delusion was his 'corrupting' element: it led him to several personal and political errors and, ultimately, to his own assassination.[11] The first section of the book was heavily focused on the

[8] C. Jouanno, 'Le corps du prince dans la Chronographie de Michael Psellos', *Kentron* 19 (2003) 205-221, esp. 215-215; I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Miguel Ataliates y Miguel Pselo (Ensayo de una breve comparación)', *Erytheia* 16 (1995) 85-95, esp. 90-91: 'La habilidad en la caracterización de los héroes es, quizás, el principal logro artístico de Pselo .... El arte con que Pselo los pinta es, más que nada, lo que 'borra' el espacio de nueve siglos que nos separa de este autor bizantino'; Neville also argues that, in the case of the *Alexiad*, those elements that seemed most intriguing to modern readers were possibly related to the author's need to solve key problems: L. Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (New York, NY 2016).

[9] E. Pietsch, *Die Chronographia des Michael Psellos: Kaisergeschichte, Autobiographie und Apologie* (Wiesbaden 2005) exposes Psellos' multi-folded aims in his work.

[10] I have provided an illustrative graph annex to this chapter, resuming the prominence of different characters throughout this account; see also N.C. Koutrakou, 'Psellus, Romanus III and an Arab Victory 'Beyond any Reasonable Expectation': Some Remarks on Psellus' Perception of Foreign Relations', *Graeco-Arabica* 11 (2011) 319-345.

[11] Here I agree with A. Kaldellis, *The Argument,* 28-30; see also Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character,* 76, 104, and 134-135, although Lauritzen reads Psellos' representation of Romanos as that of a man who is excessively worried about others' opinion, while I emphasise the delusional element of Psellos' description: Romanos simply believes, at first, that he can achieve great things, while his later frustration will contribute to his tyrannical policies.

description of the emperor's character, which was clearly depicted as overambitious from the beginning:

> This Romanos, believing that his rule marked the beginning of a new period, because the imperial family (γένος) founded by Basil the Macedonian had died with his father-in-law Constantine, he now contemplated the new generation (γενεάν) [that would follow his reign]. In fact, he not only was about to circumscribe his power to his own existence, but also, living in a short period of time, and this period suffering of sickness, he suddenly surrendered his soul.[12]

The narrator was clearly invested in highlighting this ambitious aspect to his audience: he portrayed the emperor's unrealistic goals, and predicted his downfall from the beginning. The terms οἴομαι – 'to suppose, deem, imagine or believe', henceforth 'to believe' – and οἴησις – conventionally translated as 'opinion' or, as I will translate below as to highlight Psellos' persistence, 'belief' – appear repeatedly in Psellos' account, consistently linking the name and reign of Romanos with his delusional character. The description of the emperor followed, wherein Psellos contrasted the superficial appearance of the emperor as an ideal man, but repeatedly underlined the superficial character of this image:

> He believed to know more than what he knew. Wishing to model his reign on those ancient Antonines and the most philosophic and pious Marcus, he upheld two principles: the study of letters and care for warfare. Of the latter he was completely ignorant. As for letters, his knowledge was far from profound – merely superficial. But this belief [in his own knowledge], and this straining beyond his own intellectual limits, led him to commit mistakes on a big scale.[13]

As these lines were placed at the very beginning of the account, we can expect them to have heavily influenced the readers' expectations for the following account on Romanos' actions and his policy. Psellos took care in reminding the reader of the overconfident and ultimately

[12] *Chronographia* 3.1.2-8: Οὗτος τοίνυν ὁ Ῥωμανὸς, ὥσπερ ἀρχὴν περιόδου τὴν ἡγεμονίαν οἰηθεὶς, ἐπειδὴ ἐς τὸν πενθερὸν Κωνσταντῖνον τὸ βασίλειον γένος ἀπετελεύτησεν, ἐκ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μακεδόνος ἠργμένον, εἰς μέλλουσαν ἀπέβλεπε γενεάν. ὁ δὲ ἔμελλεν ἄρα, οὐ μόνον ἑαυτῷ περιγράψειν τὸ κράτος· ἀλλὰ καὶ βραχύν τινα ἐπιβιώσας χρόνον· καὶ τοῦτον νοσερὸν, ἀθρόον τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπερεύξασθαι.

[13] *Chronographia* 3.2.5-12: πολλαπλάσια δὲ ᾤετο εἰδέναι, ὧνπερ ἐγίνωσκεν. βουλόμενος δὲ ἐς τοὺς ἀρχαίους Ἀντωνίνους ἐκείνους, τόν τε φιλοσοφώτατον Μάρκον· καὶ τὸν Εὐσεβῆ, ἀπεικάσαι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν, δυοῖν τούτων ἀντείχετο, τῆς τε περὶ τοὺς λόγους σπουδῆς· καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰ ὅπλα φροντίδος. ἦν δὲ θατέρου μὲν μέρους τέλεον ἀδαής. τῶν δὲ λόγων τοσοῦτον μετεῖχεν, ὅσον πόρρω τοῦ βάθους· καὶ ἐπιπόλαιον. ἀλλὰ τὸ οἴεσθαι· καὶ τὸ πλεῖον τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς μέτρου συντείνειν ἑαυτὸν, ἐν τοῖς μεγίστοις τοῦτον ἠπάτησεν.

unrealistic character for Romanos' political manoeuvres. Psellos depicted the generation of philosophers living at Romanos' time:

> That era produced few men of erudition (λογίους), and even they stood only at the outer door of the Aristotelian doctrines, and merely repeated some Platonic clues; without any understanding of their hidden knowledge or of what these men studied in dialectics or apodeictics …. one could see the palace bearing the appearance of philosophy; it was all a mask and pretence, and there was no inquiry or scrutiny for truth.[14]

This description coincided remarkably with the emperor's character, and constituted an autonomous section of the account, opened and closed by the same word.[15] Psellos makes a binomial distinction of the emperor's two-folded enthusiasm in internal affairs – the studies referred to earlier, and later philanthropic concerns – and external campaigns. The narrator first introduced Romanos' military ambitions. Psellos hastened to describe Romanos' campaigns as unreasonable and overambitious from the very beginning:

> The reasoning was to conquer the whole barbarian world, east and west alike …. Had the emperor's twofold inclination [towards the study of letters and war] not constituted mere belief and pretension, but a true grasp of both aspects, it would have benefited everyone greatly.[16]

Then Psellos moved the narrative's focus back to the imperial chambers, underlining Romanos' unsuccessful efforts in producing an offspring with Zoe. She was fifty years old at that time, Psellos added, and he was twenty years older than her. Nevertheless, Romanos ignored this and exposed Zoe and himself to all kinds of treatments to increase their fertility.[17] According to Psellos, failure to conceive a child drove Romanos away from Zoe, who ultimately found

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[14] *Chronographia* 3.3.1-5 and 10-12; βραχεῖς γὰρ ὁ τηνικαῦτα χρόνος λογίους παρέτρεφε, καὶ τούτους μέχρι τῶν ἀριστοτελικῶν ἑστηκότας προθύρων· καὶ τὰ πλατωνικὰ μόνον ἀποστοματίζοντας σύμβολα· μηδὲν δὲ τῶν κεκρυμμένων εἰδότας· μηδ' ὅσα οἱ ἄνδρες περὶ τὴν διαλεκτικὴν· ἢ τὴν ἀποδεικτικὴν ἐσπουδάκασιν …. καὶ ἦν ὁρᾶν τὸ βασίλειον, σχῆμα μὲν φιλόσοφον περικείμενον· ἦν δὲ προσωπεῖον τὸ πᾶν καὶ προσποίησις· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀληθείας βάσανος καὶ ἐξέτασις.

[15] Perhaps as a way to mark the two extremes of a thematic section and return to the emperor, βραχεῖς (*few* erudite men) opens section three and βραχύ (Romanos abandoned philosophical matters *for a while*) marks the beginning of the next topic; I will discuss the relation between the emperors' actions and the political body, in which one must include the different generations of philosophers, on pages 237-245 in chapter 5.

[16] *Chronographia* 3.4.2-3 and 5-7: καὶ ἡ ἐπιχείρησις, ἅπαν ἑλεῖν τὸ βάρβαρον, ὅσον τε ἑῷον· καὶ ὅσον ἑσπέριον …. ἡ τοίνυν τοῦ βασιλέως περὶ ἄμφω ῥοπὴ, εἰ μὴ οἴησις καὶ προσποίησις ἦν· ἀλλ' ἀληθεστάτη κατάληψις, μέγα τι ἐλυσιτέλησε τῷ παντί.

[17] *Chronographia* 3.5.

another lover, the future emperor, Michael IV. Romanos is overall criticised for the variability of his opinions.[18] He was not a suitable emperor, Psellos, argued, as he was carried away by the moment's opinions and emotions. As the narrative develops, Psellos showed how having this man in charge created serious challenges for the empire.

The chapter then brings us back to the military side of Romanos' reign, namely the unsuccessful campaign in Syria. The choice of this campaign is viewed as a matter of Romanos' personal ambition: campaigning in the east would be more glorious for him. Other generals opposed Romanos, and attempted to dissuade the ruler, but he rejected their advice. The representation of these disapproving generals, sometimes treated as *realia* in modern accounts of this reign,[19] is explained as a narrative counterpoint, very common in our sources: they impersonated the dissident, reasonable voices with whom the readers are led to sympathise. Romanos rejected them, and in doing so, his decision looked even more selfish and irrational.

Romanos marched to Antioch with his army. His entry into the city is defined as 'theatrical' (θεατρικήν).[20] Evidently opposed to Romanos' strategy, the barbarians adopted a more reasonable approach, and sent embassies, suing for peace. Yet Romanos resolved to carry on, as he wished to imitate the deeds of Trajan, Hadrian Augustus, Caesar, or even Alexander the Great.[21] Interestingly enough, Skylitzes defended Romanos' policy in a very similar manner to how Psellos criticised it. Both examined the emperor's decision under the light of past campaigns, but instead of referring to ancient rulers, Skylitzes presented Romanos' campaign as a reasonable continuation of the policies of Nikephoros II Phokas, John I Tzimiskes and, to some extent, Basil II.[22] This coincidence in the narratives suggests either Skylitzes' direct use

[18] *Chronographia* 3.6.
[19] *Chronographia* 3.7; A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (Oxford 2017) 160.
[20] *Chronographia* 3.8.5.
[21] *Chronographia* 3.8.
[22] John Skylitzes, *Synopsis* 378.34-379.74.

of a common source with the *Chronographia*, or that both authors were inspired by a wider tradition which recounted Romanos' reign. In both cases, we can see how the campaign in Syria was discussed in terms of the emperor's personal aims.[23]

Psellos' explanation of Romanos' reign was based on linking his *ethos* to different political events. Romanos' tactical errors led him to a military disaster. As Psellos had anticipated earlier in the account, Romanos' failure in Syria did not encourage him to be more cautious or prudent, but rather the opposite. After the campaign, Romanos became a tyrant obsessed with extracting wealth from the rich. This wealth was directed to expensive and thus easily-criticised pious building projects, namely a church dedicated to Saint Mary Peribleptos, which represented Romanos' insane ambition rather than his piety.[24] Then the narrative left the emperor and explored Zoe's love affairs with the young Michael, which led to Romanos' assassination attempt by Zoe's men.[25] Romanos' rejection of Zoe was portrayed as the cause for Zoe's latter actions, and therefore of Romanos' own death.

Psellos' account of Romanos was designed to demonstrate that the political events in the empire, from the tax policy to the generation of philosophers at the time, not to mention military campaigns, were linked to a single man's character. Political events and the description of Romanos' character overlapped in a way that might not have sounded disturbing to the audience, even if they were supposed to be reading about historical events and not an encomiastic account. Not only was a cross-section of the audience familiar with other accounts that combined history and biography, but Psellos combined these two genres in order to promote his authorial persona.[26]

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[23] A. Laiou, 'Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes', *DOP* 46 (1992), 171-172.
[24] *Chronographia* 3.12-3.16; a further discussion on Romanos' ecclesiastical policy will follow on page 223.
[25] Michael's introduction and his affair with Zoe go can be found in *Chronographia* 3.18-3.23. The illness is referred from 3.24-3.25, being 3.26 the final section of the narration on this emperor, concerning his death.
[26] On the combination of history and biography, see page 76 above; see also S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013).

Despite the uniqueness of the *Chronographia* among other middle Byzantine historical narratives, the pattern of focusing on the emperors' characteristic *ethoi* repeated itself over and over in different accounts. One way or another, emperors played a central role in eleventh-century narratives. Victories and defeats of the empire tended to be read as responsibility of the emperor in charge, and thus marked their suitability to the throne. For instance, in the *Synopsis* the rebellion of George Maniakes on the Western frontier of the empire was explained as a consequence of a Constantinopolitan affair, namely the relationship between the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos and the *augusta* Skleraina. Only because Skleraina had an affair with Constantine, Skylitzes argues, were the Skleroi able to attack Maniakes' properties in Anatolia, and thus triggered his rebellion. Thus the episode was read as symptomatic of the internal corruption of the Byzantine court, a consequence of Constantine's base desires. Maniakes was finally taken down by Constantine's loyalists, but his defeat was not presented as a glorious moment of the empire, but rather as the pitiful end of an otherwise victorious Roman general. The story directs the blame to the emperor, who caused misery to the empire.[27]

In the case of Attaleiates' *History*, the emperor was still at the centre of the narrative, but differently from Psellos' *Chronographia*. As will be shown in later sections, the narrator of the *History* did not focus so much on defining an original *ethos* for each ruler, but on judging the morality of their actions, distinguishing between characters who are acting according to the imperial ideal and those who acted against the rules, and were thus punished. As we will see, Attaleiates read different catastrophic episodes, such as military defeats or earthquakes, as signs of the divine punishment to the sinful emperor. Thus, emperor and cosmos were still

[27] *Synopsis* 427.57-428.98.

linked in the *History*, albeit in a different form from that used by Psellos in the *Chronographia*.[28]

Nevertheless, some passages placed at the beginning of the *History*, during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos, seem to move against this general tendency. These smaller episodes, presented as a group of autonomous *diegemata* or didactic tales, described events revolving around minor characters such as frontier generals and heroic soldiers, and thus are unconnected to the depiction of the ruling emperor.[29] However, I will argue that these stories did not deviate from Attaleiates' depiction of the emperors' morality. These smaller stories were preparing the ground for the larger narratives at the climatic end of the *History*, on the reigns of Romanos IV Diogenes, Michael VII Doukas, and Nikephoros III Botaneiates.

The first story, a short episode of 175 words, mentions an official named Liparites, who was captured by the Turks and sent to their 'sultan' (σουλτάνος). Once captured, the sultan asked him how he should be treated, and the prisoner mysteriously responded 'royally' (βασιλικῶς). The sultan reacted positively: Liparites was freed and returned to the City, received with applause by everyone due to his courage.[30] Previous scholars, such as Renata Gentile and Inmaculada Pérez Martín, read the enigmatic episode as an (unsuccessful) attempt

[28] The debate on Attaleiates' evaluation of omens and their relation with historical causality can be found on pages 178-181; Attaleiates is not alone in this aspect: his style can be compared to his near-contemporary Leo the Deacon.

[29] D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium (Tempe, AR 2012)*, esp. 79, argues that 'the *History*, as we know it today, is in fact easy to conceive as a response to Psellos' *Chronographia*', an account focused on defining adequate imperial policies, instead of revolving around particular rulers; earlier publications pointed in that direction as well, such as Ljubarskij, 'Miguel Ataliates y Miguel Pselo', 88: 'a veces comienza a dar la impresión de que ambos historiadores mantienen entre sí una polémica oculta sobre la conveniencia de 'adaptarse a las circunstancias': algo que Pselo defiende todo el tiempo, pero que Ataliates rechaza con desprecio'; D.R. Reinsch, 'Wer waren die Leser und Hörer der *Chronographia* des Michael Psellos?' *ZRVI* 50 (2013) 389-398 noted significant parallels between the *Chronographia* and the *History*; and yet I disagree in approaching the *History* as a response to the arguments conveyed in the earlier account – the *History* stands on its own pretty well; similarly, Holmes approached some passages of the *Synopsis* as didactic *diegemata*: C. Holmes, 'The Rhetorical Structures of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 187-200.

[30] Michael Attaleiates, *History* 45/36.13-37.2.

by the sultan of acting like a civilised Roman instead of a barbarian.[31] But perhaps, in order to understand the intended message of this shorter tale, we should look at its relation to the imperial protagonists of the *History*, and specifically the three later emperors, whose depiction occupies about two thirds of the whole account. Liparites' story, and the strange mention of the word 'βασιλικῶς', were possibly intended to evoke the later climatic episode of Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes' capture in Manzikert. His return to Constantinople was quite different: instead of being received with applause, the tyrannical Michael VII Doukas ordered his capture and blinding. Michael's mistreatment of Romanos, his benefactor and a man who sacrificed his interests to fight for the empire, was a fundamental element of the narrative and the depiction of the former as a tyrant to be deposed by Botaneiates.[32]

The second example follows Liparites' episode. When the Turks were attacking Manzikert, God inspired a Latin soldier, who conceived a way to break the siege.[33] The triumph over the siege in Manzikert was attributed to this Latin man, probably mirroring the prestige of another Latin, Rouselios, in maintaining the Byzantine Anatolian positions after Manzikert. Later in the narrative, Attaleiates developed the figure of the Latin general Rouselios as a rebellious Latin who nevertheless constituted a great support of the empire's interests in Anatolia. Michael VII Doukas' mistreatment of Rouselios was explicitly criticised by the narrator, and connected to future episodes of the account. In Attaleiates' words, 'without realising it, [Michael] deprived the Roman Empire of the greatest level of strength and prosperity, as events later demonstrated'.[34] The early story of the Latin who saved the day thus

[31] R. Gentile, 'Tipologia della rappresentazione dei Turchi in fonti byzantine dei secoli XI-XII', *ByzForsch* 25 (1999) 305-324, here 310-311; I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates. Historia* (Madrid 2002) 253 n. 123; their reading of the scene seems more plausible when applied to the *Synopsis* 454.
[32] *History* 174-180/135.2-139.7.
[33] *History* 46-47/37.10-38.4; commented by Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 159: 'within a few strokes of the pen, Attaleiates converted this Latin warrior into an image of Roman military virtue'.
[34] *History* 207/160.7-9: ἔλαθε μεγίστης ἰσχύος καὶ εὐπραγίας ἀποστερήσας τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν, ὡς καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα τὰ πράγματα παρεστήσαντο.

exemplified what that other Latin, namely Rouselios, could still have done for the empire.[35] Although Krallis cited the story of Rouselios to demonstrate that the *History* is not entirely devoted to descriptions of emperors, my argument is rather the opposite.[36] Since Rouselios became another (unnecessary) victim of Michael VII Doukas' rule, his story served to consolidate the evil character of the emperor and his advisor Nikephoritzes. His story is critical to Attaleiates' character assassination of Michael VII.[37]

In Attaleiates' narrative, Michael's tyranny was put to an end by the salvific emperor Botaneiates. He had already been described as a heroic commander in the earliest sections of the *History*, close to the stories of Liparites and the anonymous Latin warrior. After the Roman army was defeated in a battle against the Pechenegs, Botaneiates managed to keep his army force united and lead a successful retreat to Adrianople. They marched for nine days under constant enemy attack; their survival, Attaleiates argued, depended on the charisma of their leader Botaneiates.[38] The scholarly consensus is that these early stories about Botaneiates are nothing but later insertions into the account, aimed at praising Attaleiates' new imperial patron.[39]

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[35] We can conclude likewise for other episodes from the *History* where Latins are portrayed positively, or as unfair victims of the Roman vileness: 9/7.19-25 (on the loss of Italy) and 122-124/96.11-97.15 (on Romanos IV's eastern campaigns).

[36] I agree with Krallis' argument when he asserts that, in Attaleiates' eyes, Rouselios had become an insider of the empire instead of a foreigner: Krallis, *Imperial Decline,* 163 and 167; but I do not agree on the point argued by Krallis *Imperial Decline*, 160-163, namely that Attaleiates was implicitly mocking Botaneiates by presenting a Latin as more capable to rule than him; nor do I agree with Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 168: 'a person's actions and not his ethnic background defined his identity and Attaleiates' opinion of him' since, as reflected in the passage depicting the relationship between Romanos IV and a Turkish guest in Contantinople, further discussed on page 198, Attaleiates displays an *a priori* negative image of the Turks; Attaleiates' depiction of the Latins as potential allies throughout the *History*, to my view, builds up to the narrative of Rouselios' unfair punishment, used to criticise Michael VII.

[37] This Rouselios-centred approach would explain Attaleiates' overall depiction of the Normans as Latins, which has received recent attention by A. Olson, 'Working with Roman History: Attaleiates' Portrayal of the Normans', *BMGS* 41.1 (2017) 1-14.

[38] *History* 39-43/32.12-35.8.

[39] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xli; Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, xxxi-xxxii and 142-157; A. Kaldellis, 'The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative Ontologies', in S. Marjanović-Dušanić (ed.), *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22-27 August 2016, Plenary Papers* (Belgrade 2016) 296; there are moments in the narrative where the insertion of a later passage praising Botaneiates seems apparent, as in *History* 56/44.26-45.3, a passage noted for its 'intruded nature' in by the English translators of the *History*: A. Kaldellis and D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates,*

However, we might have established an artificial polarisation between a 'pure' account and its supposed later additions. As seen above, Attaleiates' account on Constantine IX Monomachos was fractioned in smaller stories revolving around military tales of victory and defeat.[40] If, as I argued, some of these stories implicitly alluded to the later, larger accounts on the 'main' emperors of the book, Botaneiates' heroic episode does not look so differently constructed. Attaleiates' careful construction of character throughout the text suggests that one should be cautious of classifying the insertion about Botaneiates as a character in the earlier sections of the *History* as a latter addition into the account without acknowledging the compound character of, at least, this part of the *History*. Attaleiates' approach to Monomachos' reign resembles a collection of stories put together under the umbrella of the imperial wars against Turks and Pechenegs.[41] What binds these stories together is their connection to the more detailed events narrated at the end of the *History*, which concerned the morality of the emperors Romanos IV, Michael VII and Nikephoros III – the emperors' morality was, thus, at the centre of the *History*, even in the accounts that are seemingly about minor characters.

3.2. Empresses and other female characters

Despite sharing the throne with their male counterparts, empresses occupied a much smaller space in the narratives when compared with their male counterparts. Even when empresses and other female characters were mentioned, they tended to show up in the narrative as characters secondary to the wider narrative of the emperor, and were often presented in a negative light,

The History (Cambridge, MA and London 2012) 598-599 n. 98 and 99; I argue, however, that other parts of the narrative, particularly the short stories mentioned above, could equally have been assembled into the *History* at different moments, so a neat separation between the original material and later intrusions becomes inadequate.

[40] I will expand my argument in pages 130-134 below, where I show the role of other small stories from this section of the *History*; similarly, it is possible that the story of Leo Tornikes aimed to legitimise the rebellion of Nikephoros Botaneiates, who, differently from Tornikes, managed to achieve victory through a successful entrance in Constantinople: *History* 22-30/18.5-24.24.

[41] In fact, early stories of Attaleiates look like *progymnasmata* or *diegemata* (tales) inasmuch as they develop a brief, dramatic episode with a moral end: E. Jeffreys, 'Rhetoric in Byzantium' in I. Worthington, ed., *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2007) 170-173, and 175-176.

usually to depict the emperor in a negative way.[42] For example, Skylitzes' depiction of Zoe represented the empress as a negative force for the empire's stability: she 'fell madly and demonically in love' with Michael before poisoning her husband Romanos.[43] Michael V also received advice 'not to trust the *despoine* but be on guard against her, lest he suffer the same fate as his uncle, the emperor Michael, and of Romanos his predecessor, who had been done away with wizardry (they said)' – to prevent this, Michael's advisors proposed that he should confine her in the palace.[44]

Zoe appeared in Skylitzes' narrative only when negative events are about to happen due to her influence, such as Romanos' assassination or the rebellion against Michael V. Similarly, Constantine's love for the *augusta* Skleraina is depicted by Skylitzes as the cause for Maniakes' rebellion against the emperor, referred to in the previous section: the emperor and a military disaster were connected through the character of the *augusta*.[45] The short-lived sole reigns of female rulers were usually concluded by the narrator arguing an essential incompatibility of the 'affairs of the women's quarters' and the ruling of the state, or to exert a vital role in military affairs.[46]

The prominence of empresses in the narrative varied in the different accounts, and yet, they almost invariably appeared in the story to tell us something about the emperor and how he interacted with his family. Attaleiates' *History* describes empresses only rarely, except for the short reigns of Zoe and Theodora, and the later regency of Eudokia. Eudokia's presence in the story precisely aimed to show how Michael VII breaks with traditional familial roles, as

[42] On Byzantine literature, history writing and gender: L. James, *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London 1997); Brubaker, 'Sex, Lies and Textuality', 83-101. A. Kaldellis 'The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions,' in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London 2010) 61-71.
[43] *Synopsis* 390.81-82: πρὸς τοῦτον ἡ βασιλὶς ἔρωτα δαιμονιώδη σχοῦσα καὶ μανικόν.
[44] *Synopsis* 417.90-92: μὴ πιστεύειν τῇ δεσποίνῃ, ἀλλὰ φυλάττεσθαι ταύτην, ἵνα μὴ παραπλήσια πάθῃ τῷ τε θείῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ βασιλεῖ Μιχαὴλ καὶ τῷ πρὸ αὐτοῦ Ῥωμανῷ, γοητείαις, ὡς ἔφασκον, κατεργασθέντι.
[45] *Synopsis* 427.57-428.98; see page 88.
[46] *Chronographia* 6.5 and 6.10; *History* 96/76.20-22; *Synopsis* 422.26-28. Further discussion will be carried in the chapter on gender stereotypes, on pages 153-160.

formalised in the writings of Menander Rhetor: Michael decreed the blinding of his adoptive father, Romanos, for which he received abundant criticism, and allowed his followers to mistreat his own mother, who was forced into exile.[47] Michael's mother, the empress Eudokia, was then represented as a pitiful figure, appearing in the narrative only to tell us about the misdoings of her adult son, who was meant to protect her as the head of his own family.[48] Contrarily, when Attaleiates describes the ancient and noble family of Nikephoros Botaneiates, even strengthening Botaneiates' physical similarities with his ancestor Nikephoros Phokas, there is no space to describe his female ancestors: Publius Scipio Africanus, Scipio Asiaticus, Aemilius Paulus, Constantine the Great and Nikephoros Phokas attest of the glorious male side of Botaneiates' family – on the female side, not even Empress Helena is deemed worth of mention.[49]

Psellos' *Chronographia* seems to be an exception concerning the strong presence of different empresses in the overall story. As referred to above, the reasons for this lay in the balance between Psellos' different priorities: to educate the intended audience about ethical and political principles, and to represent himself as a talented rhetor and a key political figure. Both biography and *enkomion* tend to include descriptions of the family and relations of the character described, an approach that opens the field to female characters.[50] However, their

[47] The spaces dedicated to these characters in the *History* are the following: 10-11/9.22-9.5, 13/10.21-11.12, 15-16/12.26-13.25, 17/14.6-8 (on the reign and downfall of Michael V), 17-18/14.17-15.3 (a brief account on the reign of Zoe and Theodora), 51-52/41.9-42.5 (Theodora's sole rule), 92/73.14-17, 99/78.18-20, 101/80.9-12 (on the empress Eudokia and the election of Romanos IV), 168-169/130.6-26 (on Eudokia's exile), and 179/138.19-24 (Eudokia's burial of Romanos IV); Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration* 74-83.
[48] *History* 168-169/130.6-26 and 304/233.22-234.8; similarly, Psellos depicted Romanos IV as lacking of care for the Doukas family, which contradicted his nominal role as regent and protector of the young Michael VII: 7b.18.
[49] *History* 216-237/167.3-183.7; see also N. Leidholm, 'Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades, and the Fabii: Embellished Genealogies and Contested Kinship in Eleventh-Century Byzantium', *BMGS* 42.3 (2018) 185-201; on the variety of depictions of Empress Helena, mother of Constantine, in Byzantium and beyond, see A. Georgiou, *The Cult of Flavia Iulia Helena in Byzantium. An Analysis of Authority and Perception through the Study of Textual and Visual Sources from the Fourth to the Fifteenth Century* (Birmingham 2013) [PhD Thesis].
[50] See note 47 above on Menander Rhetor.

actions and sayings orbited around whatever the narrator wanted to say about the male protagonist.[51]

A later example of an empress' depiction in the *Chronographia*, can be found at the end of Psellos' account on Isaak Komnenos. Psellos describes Isaak's illness, and his renunciation to the throne, in detail and from his own perspective as a spectator. When the emperor felt his sickness might lead to death, and chose to become a monk and abandon the throne, his wife, the Bulgarian princess Ekaterina, raised her voice in protest. Ekaterina first impersonated a critical voice as a Roman *matrona*, reprimanding Isaak from a familial perspective: his actions would expose the family to enemies at court. Here, she was making explicit an existing tension between family obligations and individual pursuit of holiness. Ekaterina's speech could be labelled as 'emotional' and untrustworthy by other Byzantine authors, it was effective in achieving a compromise between her position and Isaak's:

> But [the empress] did not convince him with her words. When she despaired of the debate, she said, 'at least produce as successor to the empire the man who is most loyal and well-disposed towards you, so he will treat you with due honour as long as you live, and will be considered as much as a son to me'. The emperor gained strength at these words, and the *doux* Constantine immediately is called to appear before him.[52]

[51] L. Brubaker, 'The Age of Justinian: Gender and Society', in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2005) 427-447, esp. 428; one example of this can be found in *Chronographia* 6.4: while Psellos metaphorically framed the relation of different emperors with politics as the battle of a sailor in deep sea, as will be discussed in pages 185-189 below, Zoe's character is described as the sea waves – more than a courageous captain, she is described as a hazard; on Psellos' use of metaphors, see J. Duffy, 'Bitter Brine and Sweet Fresh Water: The Anatomy of a Metaphor in Psellos', in C. Sode and S. Takács (ed.) *Novum Millennium: Studies in Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck* (Aldershot 2001) 89-96.

[52] *Chronographia* 7.83.1-6: ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔπειθε λέγουσα. ἐπεὶ δὲ ταύτης ἀπεγνώκει τῆς συμβουλῆς, «ἀλλ' ἡμῖν γε» φησὶ «διάδοχον τῆς βασιλείας τὸν εὐνοϊκώτατόν σοι καὶ εὐμενέστατον ποίησον, ὅπως ἂν καὶ σοὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα συντηρήσειε ζήσαντι· κἀμοί γε ὁπόσα παῖς χρηματίσειε.» ἀνερρώσθη γοῦν ἐπὶ τούτοις ὁ βασιλεὺς· καὶ ὁ δοὺξ Κωνσταντῖνος, εὐθὺς ἐκείνῳ μετάπεμπτος γίνεται; L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. The* Material for History *of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge, 2012) 140-147 underlines the inadequacy of Aikaterine's invasion of the masculine space, and the apparent incoherence of her words; that being the case, her role was not only that of an unreliable speaker who indirectly reinforced the adequacy of Isaak's tonsure: the flow of Psellos' narrative benefits from Aikaterine's dramatic speech as she posed a problem perceived as real by the audience – otherwise, Isaak's decision to name Constantine his successor would not constitute such an ideal relief for both Isaak and the audience Psellos sought to persuade.

Ekaterina's speech worked as a dramatic point, while her suggestion of Constantine as new emperor was reflected as a situation of compromise between her and her husband. Ekaterina enjoyed some prominence in the narration, but only as a literary vehicle aimed at explaining how one male ruler ceded the throne to another.

Scholars interested in reconstructing the life and deeds of particular Byzantine empresses have faced difficulties in dealing with their representations in the written sources, precisely because the narratives are not focused on them, not even in Psellos' work.[53] The example of Psellos' account of Romanos III illustrates this point clearly. There the empress Zoe was presented as the second most prominent character of the chapter (as revealed in appendices 1 to 4), and the sections from the narrative related to her – Zoe's disappointing relationship with Romanos and love affair with Michael – occupied a quarter of the narrative.[54] However, as discussed above, Romanos' account is focused on his delusional worldview and policies; Zoe is only represented as a participant and a victim of Romanos' delusions, and the embodiment of Romanos' failures once she openly displays her lover in front of him.

A similar situation could be found when Michael V resolved to exile Zoe. Once she was tonsured and on board the boat that would take her into exile, the empress enjoyed some prominence by being described in her sadness, and even pronouncing a lament, directed to her

[53] L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204* (London and New York, NY 1999) 136-158 provided an example of an attempt to reconstruct Zoe's life and political and personal intentions behind her actions; similarly, Eudokia's role as empress has been defined as 'ambivalent' by Speros Vryonis, most likely as a result of not analysing her character as complementary to the depiction of male rulers: her character is not torn apart between love to her husband and to her children, as Vryonis argued, but rather serves to construct the dramatic end of Romanos IV, and to depict Michael VII as a tyrant: S. Vryonis, 'Michael Psellus, Michael Attaleiates: The Blinding of Romanus IV at Kotyaion (29 June 1072) and His Death on Proti (4 August 1072)', in C. Dendrinos, J. Harris, E. Harvalia-Crook, and J. Herrin (eds.), *Porphyrogenita: Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides* (Aldershot 2003) 4; a more detailed analysis of Attaleiates' construction of Romanos IV's character follows on pages 278-287 below.

[54] See appendices 1 to 4 on pages 308-310; this proportion increases up to 40% of the whole account if we understand that, from Psellos' point of view at least, Zoe is guilty of the emperor's disease and death; therefore, these passages are linked to her persona as well. However, Zoe's actions are presented as a reaction to Romanos' imperfect character, as is discussed below.

uncle, Basil II.[55] By including this passage, the narrator inspired sympathy for Zoe, just as the people of Constantinople did in the next passage. Zoe's speech was then used as a means to prepare the audience to read the subsequent popular rebellion the way that Psellos intended, namely an understandable punishment of Michael and his family.

Zoe enjoys particular prominence in the account on Constantine IX' reign, where Psellos analysed, in detail, the personal life of this emperor at court. Constantine's chapter stands out from the rest of Psellos' work in terms of space, and is filled with philosophical digressions, details of Constantine's personal affairs and different events at court. This approach made it possible to move from describing generals, barbarians, and monks, to focusing the narrative's attention on prominent members of the palace, namely Zoe and Theodora, but also the *augusta* Skleraina, and lovers and friends of the imperial family. Once again, Psellos' focus across the narration is to critically analyse the flawed life and policy of the emperor, illustrated in his love affairs and the keeping of odd company, such as the comedian Romanos Boilas. [56]

A key indicator of the secondary role of Zoe's representation in the *Chronographia* is the inconsistency of her representation. Previous scholarship suggested that Psellos changed his opinion on the suitability of Zoe and Theodora for ruling halfway through his account.[57] I would rather argue that Psellos' change in tone responded to narrative demands rather than gender conventions. Even though the reign of the two sisters was indeed unique, Psellos had

[55] *Chronographia* 5.22.
[56] *Chronographia* 6.139-149: the reason for Psellos' fixation on describing the court life may be two-folded: his condition as insider allowed him to tell interesting stories to the readers of the *Chronographia*, and also allowed him to criticise the emperor Constantine from a seemingly impartial, fundamentally-descriptive approach; on Psellos' bias against Constantine Monomachos: Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*, xxx and 181; for a further discussion on the narrative structure in the sixth book of the *Chronographia*, see pages 267-268 below.
[57] B. Hill, L. James and D. Smythe, 'Zoe: The Rhythm Method of Imperial Renewal', in P. Magdalino (ed.) *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews, March 1992* (Aldershot 1994) 228: 'Psellos is unsure how to present these women governors: they were the legal heirs to the empire, the means of renewal; yet as women, for them to be empresses-regnant was perceived as a perversion of the natural order …. Up to this point, Psellos' presentation of Zoe and Theodora has been largely positive. The complementary natures of the women were working together to renew the state's fortunes after the catastrophe of Michael V's tyranny. But then there comes the shift …. Psellos has changed his point of view: women belong in the women's quarters'.

years to organise his mind on the matter before finishing the first part of his *Chronographia*. The inconsistency on the representation of Zoe stemmed from her role as a secondary character in different accounts. Instead of drawing a line only at the moment when Michael V was deposed, between a positive portrait of the empresses and the beginning of criticism to their rule, one can observe more subtle changes in Psellos' characterisation of the empress. Zoe's depiction during Romanos' rule was a negative characterisation of the persuasive empress, solely responsible for the emperor's death. Michael IV, praised by Psellos, would therefore be relatively free of guilt. Zoe then played a small role in the account on Michael IV, reduced to the women's quarters by the man to whom she offered the throne.[58] Her role in the account of Michael V's reign was that of a figure aiming to inspire sympathy from the audience, serving as the ultimate martyr punished by the tyrannical Michael.[59] Zoe's image during Monomachos' reign is one of a reprehensible, at best parodic, figure, which underlines her husband's flaws and the role of Psellos within the court, as observer, critic, and advisor of a flawed ruler.

Therefore, Zoe, arguably the most prominent female character in the *Chronographia* together with her sister Theodora, becomes whatever Psellos needs her to become in a narrative essentially focussed in male rulers and Psellos himself.[60] Even though 'by inheritance, imperial blood and descent she was the ruler of Byzantium, and the years 1028 to 1050 are hers',[61] the lens through which Psellos described Zoe adjusted her power to a more patriarchal position. This was true at least on the surface of the account, attending to the structure of the narrative. Implicitly, Psellos was also giving testimony to Zoe's tremendous power: she was likely the orchestrator of Romanos III's assassination, was feared by Michael IV's court members, and

[58] *Chronographia* 4.2-3 and 16-17.
[59] *Chronographia* 5.17-23.
[60] This is exactly the argument of Georgiou, *Flavia Iulia Helena*, concerning the multiple representations of the empress Helena.
[61] Hill, James, and Smythe, 'Zoe: The Rhythm Method', 217.

her exile resulted in the demise of the emperor Michael V and the remaining members of his family.

3.3. Soon-to-be emperors and their predecessors

Psellos' account of Romanos III worked as a well-defined story that clearly subordinated most of the events to the depiction of one single male ruler. Once we move to the depiction of other characters, more factors intervene in the process. Firstly, from a narrative perspective, it is difficult to say with certainty exactly when some emperors' reigns have come to an end. Emperors' reigns became a framework for the historical narration, acting as a narrative keystone, whilst also marking the internal division of the book. Frequently Psellos indicated this division in the text, adding the date of the emperor's death, his years as emperor, or explicitly stating that a new emperor began his reign.[62] Then, an initial description of the emperor's character and his early commands followed.

However, in different stages of the *Chronographia* the depiction of two emperors can overlap. In the case of Psellos' account on Romanos III, we can find a lengthy depiction of the later emperor Michael IV Paphlagon.[63] Emperor Romanos' prominence in the narrative is then shared with Michael, the new pretender to the throne. Although this shared prominence depended to some extent on the historical events and how they were perceived by contemporaries, the introduction of the soon-to-be emperor in the account 'belonging' to his predecessor constituted an opportunity for the narrator to compare the two characters and clarify who was a better emperor. The story of Romanos' assassination therefore affected the description on the *ethoi* of both Romanos and Michael. On one side, Romanos' assassination was represented as the last step in his negligent administration, a model of conduct for Psellos'

[62] See, for example, *Chronographia* 1.37, 2.10-3.1, 3.26-4.1, 4.55, 6.1, 6.22, 6.203, 6a.21, 7.43, 7a.27, 7b.9, and 7b.43.
[63] *Chronographia* 3.18.

court audience. At the same time, Psellos was trying to transfer the guilt of the bloodshed to Zoe instead of Michael, presenting Zoe as the organiser of the plot and shedding doubts on the credibility of the whole theory of an assassination effectively taking place.[64] There are myriad reasons for this narrative manoeuvre: from a narrative-building perspective, it allowed Psellos to build an particularly positive depiction of Michael IV, in contrast with his nefarious predecessor and the later political disasters leading to the popular rebellion against his nephew, Michael V. Even further, Psellos' predilection to glorify the rule of Michael IV is likely due to Psellos' support of specific elements of his policies, or because Psellos first entered the court under his guidance, among other reasons.[65]

The first and the last descriptions of the imperial persona in the narratives played a key role in the overall account. Even though Michael was further described in the account of his own reign, the reader was now expected to have a first idea of him, which developed throughout the chapter that corresponded to his reign. One of the key elements used by eleventh-century Byzantine historians to describe one emperor's legitimacy to rule was the matter of his election: the ideal emperor was either legitimised by a prestigious ascendance, his expertise in various abilities, or by election grounded in a solid consensus from 'everyone'. The soon-to-be tyrant instead often reached the throne by some misfortune, or by the operations of some misguided people, moved by personal profit or possessed by negative emotions. The method of electing an emperor usually reflected in some manner the kind of ruler that individual would become. The stereotypical cases here would be the election of Michael VI, described by Psellos, Attaleiates and Skylitzes as the fruit of the court's greed,[66] or Psellos' account of the election of Romanos IV as regent, promoted by a frightened woman, Empress Eudokia.[67] On the other

[64] *Chronographia* 3.26.
[65] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 56-58 explains Psellos' encomiastic depiction of Michael based on the emperor's policies; see also S. Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 5.
[66] *Chronographia* 6a.20-21; *History* 52-53/41.23-42.12; *Synopsis* 480.31-40.
[67] *Chronographia* 7a.5. The narrator's use of gender prejudices, such as the emotionality of women, will be further discussed in chapters 4 and 10.

side, Attaleiates presented Romanos IV's election as something more than Eudokia's will: he was considered a promising ruler 'for the common interest'.[68]

The cases mentioned above belonged to interregna where, at least from the point of view of the narratives, it was necessary to choose a new (male) ruler 'from scratch'.[69] The opposite situation, the confluence between the old ruler and a new pretender in the narrative, was also a privileged moment to underline who held the legitimacy and how this was transmitted from one ruler to the other. Perhaps the clearest example of this situation was the civil war between Isaak Komnenos and Michael VI, as recounted by Psellos, Attaleiates and Skylitzes. In all three cases, Michael ascended the throne after an institutional vacuum left by the death of Constantine IX Monomachos and the two empresses Zoe and Theodora, last heirs of the Macedonian dynasty. Michael was old when he ascended the throne, appointed by the administration at Constantinople. Shortly after, he was dethroned by a rebellion of the generals from the eastern provinces, led by Isaak Komnenos, who would eventually become the new ruler. As presented by all three of our authors, this account allows us to observe two main characters – Michael VI and Isaak – in dispute over their own prominence in the narrative. All three authors weave Michael into their narration of the civil war, and the conflict between the two men, either associating Michael with turmoil and Isaak with its resolution, or the complete opposite.[70]

Attaleiates' depiction of Michael VI was far from positive, but could have been worse. The emperor was presented as too old to rule. His election was mediated by the members of

[68] *History* 100/79.24-80.5.

[69] Note that the discussion here has not so much to do with the reality of the events but about the pace of time as recounted in the narrative. Factually these interregna could have been very brief or very different as recounted. It is key to take the account in itself in order to understand the author's point. This is especially the case for accounts on some events distant in time, where the intended audience might not have been familiar, or convincingly attached to, a particular version of the facts.

[70] J. Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto: The Rhetoric of Katakalon Kekaumenos', in T. Shawcross and I. Toth (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine empire and beyond* (Cambridge 2018) 185-214, esp. 197 agrees, at least, in respect to the *Synopsis*: to Shepard, Skylitzes' account is more of a story of the 'Great Rebellion' rather than a proper coverage of the reign of Michael VI. I argue that this is the case also for the accounts of Psellos and Skylitzes.

the court, who chose a weak man that they could control. Michael clearly should not be on the throne, but Attaleiates' criticism of him was moderate: he was not a tyrant, and his old age excused his weakness. He was instead displaced by a younger man who later committed tyrannical acts: Isaak Komnenos. Isaak's depiction did not emphasise his noble ascendance, not his justifications for rising up in rebellion against the emperor.[71] Psellos and Skylitzes, however, dedicated whole pages to explain why the rebellion was, perhaps not fully legitimate, but at least explainable.[72] Isaak actively showed his discontent to other men from the military, Attaleiates claimed, and they sympathised with him and encouraged him to rebel. They prepared their plan carefully, moved away from the capital, and shortly after 'let their grievances burst forth: they heaped abuse upon the emperor and, with their spirits elated to the heights, set their plan into motion'.[73]

A rebel from the Bryennios family revealed the plan by mistreating the man sent to distribute payment to the soldiers. The man was liberated, and blinded Bryennios as a punishment. The rebels activated their plan out of fear: the rebellion had begun. A first climax of the war was reached during the battle close to a place named Polemon and Hades, toponyms whose mention by Attaleiates possibly foreshadowed the impious character of the battle.[74]

[71] Attaleiates summarised Isaak's reasons for rebelling against Michael in only five words: He was 'outraged by the slight and insulted due to some altercations' (ὑβρισθεὶς παροράσει καὶ προπηλακισθεὶς ὠθισμοῖς): *History* 53/42.22-23.

[72] Neither of the two will fully justify the rebellion, probably because a significant portion of their respective audiences would have not sympathised with an open statement in favour of a rebellion. Psellos used the word 'rebellion' instead of a euphemism to challenge the rebels: *Chronographia* 7.29; Skylitzes and his continuation will keep some degree of criticism to Isaak when evaluating his reign: *Continuation* 110-111; nevertheless, both Psellos and Skylitzes clearly sympathise with the rebellion in their account.

[73] *History* 53/43.2-4: ἐκρήσσουσι τὴν ὠδῖνα καὶ τοῦ κρατοῦντος μυκτῆρα καταχεάμενοι ἐπαίρουσιν εἰς ὕψος καὶ προὔπτον τὸ μελετώμενον.

[74] On Polemon and Hades: *History* 55/44.6-9; Attaleiates used the names of cities and places as an omen foreseeable by wise men. This is more explicit in later sections of the *History*, such as Romanos Diogenes' choice to disembark the army in Asia through Helenopolis (144/111.28-112.13), or when Nikephoros Phokas chose to disembark in Hagia instead of Phygella, a name associated with 'flight' (223-224/172.11-28); as for Polemon and Hades, Attaleiates never mentions these places again, nor he provides with additional information; John Zonaras's *Epitome* 600.6-8 also mentioned this location for the battle, as does Skylitzes in his *Synopsis* 495.41; a deeper discussion on Attaleiates' use of omens in his account will follow on pages 178-181 below.

Following a brief, tactical description of the battle and Isaak's victory, Attaleiates introduced his moral remarks on the event:

> And then father and son, as if forgetting their natural bonds, showed no compunction in eagerly slaughtering each other. Hands of sons were stained with the blood of fathers; brother struck down brother; and there was no pity or distinction made for close relations or common blood. When this rage and manic frenzy subsided, they understood the extent of the tragedy and raised their laments to the heavens.[75]

Once the narrator had caught the audience's attention to this element of the war, immediately afterwards he remarked: 'Nevertheless, Komnenos was shown to be the winner and was cheered as the victor, acclaimed as emperor by everyone'.[76] By focusing on the fratricidal element of the conflict first, Attaleiates resignified what otherwise would have been read as a plain eulogistic reference to Isaak: king of the ashes, one could say, he was acclaimed by all, noting that it refers to his supporters only, and not to the totality of the Romans, since many of them were lying under his feet. Any allusion to a triumphalist discourse here could be interpreted in relation with the previous words on the disaster that the war had meant to the empire.

Then Isaak marched towards the capital, but some dignitaries prepared a plot inside the city against Michael, before Isaak even reached the opposite coast of the Bosporus. Attaleiates immediately placed Patriarch Michael Keroularios in an ambiguous position towards the coup: he offered no real opposition to Isaak Komnenos, and ultimately sided with the rebels.[77] The

[75] *History* 55/44.17-23: τότε τοίνυν πατὴρ μὲν καὶ υἱός, τῆς φύσεως ὥσπερ ἐπιλαθόμενοι, πρὸς σφαγὴν ὀργᾶν ἀλλήλων οὐκ εὐλαβοῦντο· καὶ δεξιὰν παῖς πατρικῷ χραίνει φόνῳ καὶ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφῷ καιρίαν ἐλαύνει καὶ συγγενείας ἢ συμφυίας εἴτε τῶν ὁμοφύλων ἔλεος οὐδὲ διάκρισις ἦν, ἕως τοῦ θυμοῦ καὶ τῆς βακχικῆς μανίας ληξάντων, τῆς συμφορᾶς ᾔσθοντο καὶ κωκυτὸν αἰθέριον ἤγειραν; the introduction of digressions like this into the main text is a tool widely used by Attaleiates throughout the text, and to a certain point it is unique of his account, compared with other eleventh-century histories. It may be used by the narrator to show other set of skills, to add variety to the narrative, and most notably for persuading the audience to sympathise with his vision of the events.
[76] *History* 55-56/44.23-26: Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς νικητὴς ἀναδειχθεὶς οὗτος ὁ Κομνηνὸς τὴν ἐπινίκιον εὐφημίαν κατήνεγκε καὶ σεβαστὸς παρὰ πάντων ἀναγορευόμενος.
[77] *History* 56-58/45.7-46.21. As will become apparent in later sections of the thesis and in other publications, my interpretation of Isaak's account diverges from D. Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor, Holy Patriarch: A New Reading of the Clash between Emperor Isaakios I and Patriarch Michael Keroularios in Attaleiates' *History*', *BySl* 67 (2009) 169-190; also Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 100: Krallis argues that Attaleiates subtly supported Isaak's decision to

patriarch's decision forced the ecclesiastical hierarchy to support Komnenos. Attaleiates noted then, and not before, that Michael's opponents called him 'the Old' (τοῦ γέροντος), clearly intended as an insult. Perhaps Attaleiates included that detail as a way to represent Isaak's supporters as vile men: just as they cheered Isaak after a fratricidal conflict, now they insult an emperor that is far from being depicted as a tyrant.[78] When the patriarch ordered Michael to tonsure, thus renouncing to the empire, the emperor obeyed. He rejected those who urged him to resist: 'he could not accept this course, saying that it would be a selfish and even misanthropic thing to allow the Great City to be polluted with murder and the slaughter of others just for his own sake'.[79] Neither Psellos nor Skylitzes mentioned Michael's abdication this way, but Attaleiates portrayed him in a way that would further damage Isaak's image, for the latter started a fratricidal war for egotistic interests, as expressed in his dramatic account of the episode.

Attaleiates neither expanded the account to praise Michael, nor did he mock his decision to renounce the throne. His interest in Michael was as a foil to Isaak and the patriarch. Michael was presented as a puppet chosen by powerful members of the court, trapped in a civil war started by Isaak and supported by Keroularios. Michael was thus a grey figure in the *History*: neither an exemplary emperor, nor a tyrant, his role in the narrative is as a passive mirror reflecting the evils of Isaak Komnenos and Keroularios. Michael was almost completely absent from the story until its very end. Consequently, his few interventions should not be judged independently, as an attempt by the narrator to further develop the character. Michael's actions, especially in latter sections of the chapter, should instead be considered in relation to the two

exile the patriarch; in my view, Attaleiates praises Isaak's initial policies, only to present him later as a sinful ruler, mostly due to his decision to exile Keroularios.

[78] *History* 58/46.19, 25, and 47.3: this change in the way of addressing Michael becomes apparent to the reader, and seems to be ascribed to Michael's opponents, since the narrator uses Michael's name again when describing his pious renunciation to the throne: 59/47.12.

[79] *History* 58-59/47.8-11: οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, μισανθρωπίας καὶ φιλαυτίας ὁμοῦ πρᾶγμα λέγων εἶναι τὸ δι' αὐτὸν αυγχωρῆσαι φόνοις καὶ σφαγαῖς ἀνθρωπίναις μιανθῆναι τὴν μεγαλόπολιν.

main characters of the account: the patriarch and, most importantly, Isaak, the person to blame for the civil conflict. He started the war for dubious reasons, and unleashed a civil war for the sake of power and pride. According to Attaleiates, Isaak accessed to the throne not by glorious deeds, but by a fratricidal war and by siding with people who pursued their own ambitions and betrayed the legitimate ruler. Only after Attaleiates has established these credentials does he allow Michael into the story, represented as an honourable man who renounced the throne. That was precisely what Isaak was unable to do.

Most of Michael's chapter in the *History* could be considered, in narrative terms, as the threshold to Isaak's character assassination. Isaak was further criticised in the account that follows his victory, and resulted in military defeats, a premature death and a likely punishment in hell, as Attaleiates suggests.[80] Patriarch Keroularios' character development eventually collided with Isaak's story: the patriarch's calculated position in the conflict was 'rewarded' by his later deposition by a tyrannical Isaak. Keroularios' story, at the same time, was used to build Isaak's character and developed its own moral agency. Again the now deposed emperor Michael was used as a secondary character to show the moral cost of Keroularios' actions.[81] At the end of the account on Michael's reign, the patriarch received the former emperor, now a monk, in his monastery in a manner that closely resembles Judas' betrayal of Jesus according to Matthew's gospel. To this Attaleiates has Michael reply 'May God reward you accordingly, archbishop',[82] an omen of Keroularios' ultimate fate.

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[80] *History* 69-70/55.18-56.10.

[81] M.D. Spadaro, 'La deposizione di Michele VI: un episodio di «concordia discors» fra chiesa e militari', *JÖB,* 37 (1987) 153-171 explained the apparent dissonances in the depiction of Michael Keroularios by hypothesising that Attaleiates combined two earlier narratives in his account, namely a exculpatory account favourable to the patriarch and a different narrative that presented his actions as decisive for the rebellion's success; however, I argue that, since Keroularios' depiction was secondary to the depiction of the different emperors, Attaleiates simply was not concerned with apparent contradictions in his portrayal of the patriarch.

[82] *History* 59/47.20-21: 'Δέχεται τοῦτον ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς συναντήσει δῆθεν φιλανθρώπῳ καὶ «Χαῖρε» πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐπειπών, φίληματι τοῦτον ἀσπάζεται. ὁ δὲ «Θεός σε ἀξίως, ἀρχιερεῦ, ἀντασπάσαιτο» φήσας, …'; Matthew 26:49-50: 'καὶ εὐθέως προσελθὼν τῷ Ἰησοῦ εἶπεν Χαῖρε, ῥαββί, καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ἑταῖρε, ἐφ' ὃ πάρει'. Note the symmetry of the short reply by Michael, a total of 13 syllables (a further reference to the last supper perhaps?) divided in two flanks of 5 syllables each with a centre, the vocative, of 3 syllables. Attaleiates

The account of Psellos diverged from this markedly.[83] Psellos legitimised Isaak's candidacy for the throne, and his narrative used different elements and gave prominence to different characters and episodes. Psellos began his narration with a digression about an emperor's need to please three social groups in the empire: the people, the senate and the army.[84] It would be incautious, Psellos followed, to surrender to one or two of these powers while disregarding the other. We soon learn that Michael committed that mistake.[85] Psellos' initial digression, presented as a piece of political theory, suited the narrator's later criticism of Michael, and did not reappear in the narrative ever again. Psellos described Michael as overly generous to people around him.[86] Then Psellos explains how Isaak and other officials from the provinces were shamelessly disregarded by the emperor. Therefore, Psellos implicitly contrasted Michael's former and later attitude. Michael's dismissal of the Anatolian generals received full attention in the narrative this time. Psellos reassured the reader of the veteran character of the soldiers, their fine reputation, and their intention to receive nothing more than equal honours to the ones given by Michael to other people. Psellos then described the unreasonable behaviour of the emperor. Michael rejected all of the generals at once, while Psellos presents many other ways in which the meeting could have gone better.[87] Despite this, the generals tried to gain the emperor's favour with a second interview, which was equally rejected.[88] Psellos' legitimation of the revolt piles up to 300 words from the presentation of the generals to their decision to rebel, opposed to Attaleiates' five words on the matter.[89] This is a

made a generous use of Christological references to depict his characters. Perhaps the clearest case from the *History* is the passage on the blinding of Romanos IV, where the former emperor is thrice blinded by a Jew: *History* 178/137.18-138.8; Krallis also noted the relevance of these words: Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor', 182.

[83] Skylitzes' account will receive full attention on pages 134-144 below.

[84] *Chronographia* 7.1.9-10: δημοτικῷ πλήθει· καὶ συγκλητικῇ τάξει· καὶ συντάγματι στρατιωτικῷ.

[85] *Chronographia* 7.1-2

[86] *Chronographia* 7.2.

[87] *Chronographia* 7.3.

[88] *Chronographia* 7.4.

[89] This recount resulted from adding *Chronographia* 7.3 and 7.4 minus the headings of each section.

clear demonstration of the different attitudes of Attaleiates and Psellos, but more importantly of how each used narrative structure to convey particular points.

In Psellos' case, it is Isaak who was represented as moderate: instead of inciting his colleagues to rebellion, he restrained them. They replied by naming him leader because of his great character. Psellos described the rise of the rebellion in a triumphalist tone, remarking that the most powerful families had joined the side of this valiant general, whom he was represented as a great strategist.[90] Michael was meanwhile represented as an inconsistent man who now sought for advice. Psellos advised Michael to end his quarrel with the patriarch, send an embassy and prepare the armies. Psellos remarked that Michael failed in his first task alone, but that was enough to provoke his downfall.[91] The battle referred by Attaleiates in dramatic terms as a fratricidal slaughter appears quite differently in Psellos, who praised Isaak's military expertise and condemned his opponents' lack of skill. The blame for not summoning the western forces to aid Michael's army was put on the eunuch Theodoros, the general in charge, whom Psellos claimed joined Isaak secretly.[92]

Joining Isaak's cause was not a matter for blame in the *Chronographia*, but destroying Michael's power from inside was indeed condemned. That was precisely the accusation Psellos avoided when he narrated his embassy to emperor Isaak; though the accusation is reflected in the *Synopsis* of Skylitzes.[93] Psellos did that by depicting himself as a good advisor to Michael, by accusing the eunuch Theodoros of having secretly joined Isaak's side, and finally by representing Isaak as unaware of any coup against Michael, and eager to agree a pacific resolution for the rebellion. The narrator's focus on the hypothetical agreement reached in the meetings between the embassy presided over by Psellos and Isaak served as a proof to the

[90] *Chronographia* 7.4-9.
[91] *Chronographia* 7.10-11.
[92] *Chronographia* 7.11-14.
[93] *Synopsis* 496.79-497.18.

audience of Psellos' skills as diplomat, his good service to the Emperor Michael, and Isaak's lack of ambition. When Psellos invited the emperor to depose his claims to the throne, Isaak replied 'Do you believe that the robe has been put on me willingly; or that, if it were possible to escape it, I would delay my flight?'[94]

When Isaak was about to stop the rebellion and join Michael's side, the notices of the *coup* in the capital against Emperor Michael reached Isaak's camp. Only then, according to Psellos, Isaak reconsidered, and prepared his triumphal entry in the capital for the following day.[95] Psellos' self-depiction at that point of the story accentuated his unawareness of the *coup* and his fear of being assassinated by Isaak, now that his beloved emperor Michael had been dethroned. Isaak did not punish Psellos, but instead he kept him by his side, recognising (according to Psellos) the wisdom of the man.[96] The account concluded with the triumphal entry of Isaak in palace, which constituted a climax for the whole book: the emperor was cheered by a multitude on his entry to Constantinople, while the sun reached its zenith.[97]

The case of the civil war best exemplifies the collision of more than one male candidate to the throne in the three sources. In order to find other examples, it is enough to look to the depiction of Isaak's last moments in power in our accounts. When disease caught Isaak suddenly and violently, he arranged for his friend Constantine Doukas to succeed him in the throne. While Attaleiates and the *Continuation* referred to Isaak's succession briefly, Psellos stressed the emperor's decision.

In the *Chronographia*, Constantine was positively introduced in the account when Isaak was still alive. Psellos first described the illness as a serious threat to the emperor, which led to

[94] *Chronographia* 7.32.4-5: ἀλλὰ ὑμεῖς οἴεσθε, ὅτι μοὶ βουλομένῳ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ σχῆμα προστέθειται· ἢ ἀποδρᾶναι ἐξὸν, ἀνεβαλόμην ἂν τὴν φυγήν;
[95] *Chronographia* 7.11-43.
[96] *Chronographia* 7.34-38.
[97] *Chronographia* 7.32. Some details of this account will be expanded in future chapters, such as the sun mimicry as a mean to legitimate Isaak, on pages 167-170 below.

his praiseworthy decision to abdicate and become a monk. The empress Ekaterina of Bulgaria, Isaak's wife, engaged in the aforementioned argument for the interests of the family: who was going to protect them when the family head was gone? After much lamenting and debate between Isaak and Ekaterina, she proposed to offer the throne to Isaak's closest ally, Constantine Doukas. He would honour Isaak and care for his family, while Ekaterina would consider him like a son.[98] Then the description of Constantine began, while Isaak was still alive: the narrator described his lineage, splendid character, lack of ambition, and devotion to Psellos' advice. These elements were described in what is effectively an insertion in Psellos' account of Isaak. Psellos even mentioned that 'the story of his [Constantine's] reign must wait a little', but he followed in the praising of the soon-to-be emperor nevertheless.[99] Psellos even inferred that, before Isaak became ruler, the people preferred Constantine by virtue of his more ancient lineage. However, Constantine did not covet the throne, and even renounced his title of *kaisar*, living a modest life.[100]

Isaak then summoned Constantine, whose modesty was transmitted by his gestures. Both the ancient and the new emperor were praised by Psellos. The former cared for his family and prioritised Constantine's suitability to the throne. Constantine meanwhile was described as an ideal candidate and, above all, modest and humble. Psellos' account of Isaak closed here, and his death was not mentioned. Indeed, once the narrator declared the beginning of Constantine's own account, the action returned to Isaak's reign. Again Constantine was compared with the former emperor. Isaak was then criticised, for he forgot the promises he made to Constantine before he had become emperor, even though he was preferred by all; to this, Constantine remained faithful and by no means vengeful. Now Isaak remembered his promises, and

[98] *Chronographia* 7.83.
[99] *Chronographia* 7.85.1: ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν περὶ τῆς βασιλείας λόγος ἀναμεινάτω.
[100] *Chronographia* 7.88.

promised the crown to Constantine.[101] Psellos finally made a stop at the moment when Isaak seemed to recover, and Constantine was not yet proclaimed emperor. Then Constantine was described as humble and eager to hear Psellos' advice, almost always a good attitude in the *Chronographia*. Isaak finally expired, and Constantine's account followed.[102] The analysis of the lines described above become more complex inasmuch they probably constituted the end of the first version of the *Chronographia,* and could have been subjected to later edition.[103] Psellos compared Isaak and Constantine giving priority to the latter. He even criticised Isaak and placed him in the lower plate of the balance, but kept an overall friendly tone for the man who was both one of his most renowned patrons, and one of the pillars of Constantine's legitimacy.

3.4. 'The people' as a character in the *History*

Characters within the narratives are not always individuals. From ethnic groups to army units, one can detect a variety of collective entities playing different roles in the accounts. Did any of these collective entities gained prominence over the emperor in our narratives? In my view, they do not. This section will exemplify this point by analysing the representation of 'the people'[104] as a collective in Michael Attaleiates' *History*. That selection is intentional, functioning as a rejoinder to Krallis' recent publication on the role of this collective in the *History*. Krallis suggests that Attaleiates was interested in presenting the people as an

[101] *Chronographia* 7a.8.
[102] *Chronographia* 7a.10-14.
[103] As Pietsch argued in her monograph, the stylistic and argumentative differences between the account covering the end of Isaak's reign and the beginning of Constantine's denote a substantial change for both narrator and audience between the two parts of the *Chronographia*: Pietsch, *Die* Chronographia *des Michael Psellos*, 111-128; however, I have argued that Psellos did not conceive the two parts of his work as entirely different in style and aim: F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano: Una revisión a la aproximación bipartita de la *Cronografía* de Miguel Pselo y la *Historia* de Miguel Ataliates', *Estudios Bizantinos* 7 (2019) [Forthcoming].
[104] A modern scholar will find different terms used in the sources, deemed as relatively close to the modern English 'the people'. In the article whose analysis occupies much of the present section, Krallis localised terms such as οἱ πολλοί, δῆμος, βυζαντινοί, ὄχλος, and πλῆθος: Krallis, 'Democratic Action', esp. 47.

independent political actor, a conclusion diametrically opposed to my own interpretation of the account.

3.4.1. The deposition of Michael V Kalaphates

In 1042, the people of Constantinople rose in anger against the emperor Michael V Kalaphates, an event described by Michael Psellos as 'the most vital event of the *Chronographia*'.[105] Other authors showed similar interest in the episode. From the eyewitness perspective of a citizen of eleventh-century Constantinople, the event was, in fact, exceptional and unprecedented, especially regarding its violent and successful outcome.[106] As an allusion to this episode, Kekaumenos wrote 'for I saw the ex-emperor, lord Michael, who had once been *kaisar*, in the morning, when the sun rose, a mighty emperor, but, by the third hour of the day, pitiful and destitute and blind'.[107] Possibly as an even further reference to Michael, Kekaumenos advised to 'rejoice in good fortune, but do not be elated; I saw a ruling Emperor, in his pride in the morning, but in the evening worthy of lamentation.'[108]

The mob was enraged at how Michael had mistreated the empress Zoe, his adoptive mother, and lynchpin of the Macedonian dynasty, born in the purple chambers of the palace and on the throne for over a decade. Michael was a young man, of unremarkable descent, and was proposed for the throne only after the sudden death of his uncle, Michael IV Paphlagon. After Michael ascended to the throne as a result of his adoption by Zoe, he banished her from the capital to a monastic life. All the accounts coincide, in one way or another, in pointing at this action as the catalyst of the popular rebellion.[109] The mob rose, remained united, captured the key buildings within the city, and named an alternative candidate to the throne, Zoe's sister,

[105] *Chronographia* 5.24.16: τὸ καιριώτατον τῆς χρονογραφίας.
[106] *Chronographia* 5.25-26.
[107] Kekaumenos, *Strategikon* 100.13-16: εἶδον γὰρ τὸν ἀποβασιλέα κῦρ Μιχαὴλ τὸν γεγονότα ποτὲ καίσαρα πρωΐ μὲν ἡλίου ἀνίσχοντος κραταιὸν ὄντα βασιλέα, πρὸς τρίτην δὲ ὥραν τῆς ἡμέρας ἐλεεινὸν καὶ ἔρημον καὶ τυφλόν.
[108] *Strategikon* 59.6-8: εὐφράνθητι ἐν εὐτυχίᾳ, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐπαίρου· εἶδον γὰρ ἐγὼ βασιλέα τύραννον πρωὶ μὲν ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ, ἑσπέρας δὲ θρήνων ἄξιον.
[109] *Chronographia* 5.21-26; *History* 13/11.1-12; *Synopsis* 417.10-418.28/393.

Theodora. In a matter of a few hours, they deposed, captured, and blinded the emperor Michael. The two empresses, Zoe and Theodora, together ascended to the throne.

Was the emperor the main character of this scene in our sources? At first sight, this rare moment of popular empowerment seems a good candidate to become an exception to the rule. For Krallis, Attaleiates shifted the focus from the emperor to 'the people' as to reflect a contemporary social development, which placed the urban strata as essential political actors both in Constantinople and in other cities of the empire.[110] Krallis concludes that Attaleiates' 'serious' reflections on the 'republican' texts from Ancient Rome helped him to see through the veil of court rhetoric and admit that the people could be the legitimate political actor.[111] Therefore, Attaleiates depicted past events accordingly in the *History*: 'Attaleiates (…) turned the populace of Constantinople into the unlikely hero of a high-stakes political drama';[112] 'At the end of the day, in the words of a modern commentator, "Δημοκρατία had the last word"';[113] 'The people simply usurped the role of the emperor as an agent of God's will on earth and delivered what was seen as due punishment.'[114] Thus, according to Krallis, Attaleiates was in a privileged intellectual position to see the 'reality' of the events as it was, and he described the events accordingly in his narrative.

[110] Krallis 'Democratic action', 35. According to Krallis, the end of the Macedonian dynasty coincided with the rise of politically-mobilised urban elites, both in the capital and in other cities of the empire, like Raidestos, where Attaleiates held some properties and lived at the time of a popular rebellion. This idea is to some extent divergent from the otherwise similar approach from Kaldellis, who presented the Byzantine people as always conscious of its power. In Kaldellis' opinion, 'the popular uprising followed traditional patterns': Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*, 177. Both Kaldellis and Krallis nevertheless coincide in regarding the revolt as a proof of the existence of a politically-mobilised people, aware of its power against the not-so-autocratic emperor Michael V Kalaphates.
[111] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 35.
[112] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 38.
[113] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 44, paraphrasing S. Vryonis, 'Byzantine Δημοκρατία and the Guilds in the Eleventh Century', *DOP* 17 (1963) 308. Krallis also underlines that this type of Δημοκρατία does not correspond to 'the rule of the mob, habitually associated with democracy by the medieval Romans, but something new that had not been seen in Greco-Roman writing for centuries'.
[114] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 42-43; Kaldellis, *TBR*, 92-94 closely follows Krallis' view of events, emphasising the people's self-consciousness of their own strength and legitimacy to depose a tyrannical ruler.

Krallis' approach to the rebellion reveals a number of methodological complications.[115] First and foremost, Krallis' interpretation of the rebellion as it is depicted in the *History* is heavily dependent on parallel accounts, namely Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* and the *Synopsis* of Skylitzes. Attaleiates' silences are filled by these accounts, which thus alter the narrative of the *History* without Krallis being fully conscious of that change. Attaleiates' choice of the elements narrated, their order and focus, leads to an understanding of the rebellion as a violent punishment of Emperor Michael, the character whose actions are being judged. Far from focusing on the people and its power to resolve injustice within the empire, the account focuses on the emperor, his sin, and the divine retribution delivered to him by the mob.

Firstly, the description of the mob's motivations demonstrates where Attaleiates tries to focus the audience's attention. Krallis' defence of Attaleiates, describing the people as a political actor, underlined the mob's capacity to group around a common, specific goal. In the case of this group of rebels, their goal is to fulfil Zoe's dynastic right. Psellos gave considerable space to these motivations in his *Chronographia*, but his version of the episode led to different conclusions. Psellos' *fabula* is that of a family, which aspired to become well established on the throne, but failed in their purpose due to a combination of their different characters and the negative circumstances. Michael's punishment by the mob is the completion of a story that by far exceeds his individual character, and includes that of his predecessor, the emperor Michael IV and the *de facto* ruler John Orphanotrophos, all members of a family that clung to power and fell.[116]

However, Attaleiates' account of the downfall of Michael V is far more concerned with the morality of the individual emperor and the divine punishment elicited by his sins, hence the

[115] Some of them have been discussed above, on pages 62-64.
[116] Psellos then wondered about how the family of Zoe and Theodora managed to stay in power so long, despite their violent actions: *Chronographia* 6.1.

lack of attention to what the mob did after Michael was punished.[117] In the *History*, the mob is an operative manifestation of divine retribution over the sovereign. The narration is rich in details which repeatedly lead the audience to that conclusion.

Attaleiates starts by mentioning Michael V's election, and the reasons for his appointment as emperor. The story moves back to the moment when Michael promised loyalty to the empress Zoe as she declared him her adoptive son, which allowed him to become the new emperor. Attaleiates elaborated this event, dedicating 26 words solely to emphasise the sacred element of Michael's oath to honour Zoe, the same promises Michael is about to break.[118]

The description of Michael's character follows. Psellos' account underlines how Michael's initially good manners were only a temporary mask, while his later behaviour revealed his true, tyrannical self. Attaleiates however proceeds differently.[119] Although Attaleiates does mention that Michael did not behave ideally in the past,[120] and his encomiastic description anticipates at times his ultimate downfall, Michael is represented as being exalted by his generosity.[121] Attaleiates first depicted Michael acting generously with senators and subjects, and also liberating Constantine Dalassenos from prison, and appointing George

[117] The last page from the Bonn edition dedicated to Michael's reign illustrate how Attaleiates' focus was on Michael and not on the people, who are reflected in vague terms and only occasionally: 'courageous military men' (στρατιωτικῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ γενναίων) assaulted the palace, Michael sought for refuge in a monastery but 'his pursuers' (ἅπαντες γὰρ βρύχοντες) pulled him out from there and, 'with everyone looking' (πάντων ὁρώντων), Michael and his uncle the *nobelissimos* were blinded: *History* 17/13.26-14.18; Afterwards, Zoe returned from exile, recovered the throne and her sister Theodora joined her, being both proclaimed empresses without any reference to the people that elevates them to such position: 17-18/14.17-21. Of course the audience of the *History* would remember previous allusions to the people, but here I stress the narrator's lack of interest in linking the outcome of the rebellion to popular agency – events unfolded, not because of the people's will, but because Michael's fault needed proper retribution.

[118] Relics are here understood as vehicles of direct communication with God: M. Innes, *An Introduction to Early Medieval Western Europe, 400-900: The Sword, the Plough and the Book* (London 2000) 46; Kaldellis, *TBR*, 94 recognises the significance of this gesture.

[119] Skylitzes' story equally diverges on this respect from both Psellos and Attaleiates: Michael's decision to exile Zoe was motivated by the *domestikos* and John Orphanotrophos, both characters being repeatedly represented as archetypically evil or at least misguided: *Synopsis* 417.88-95.

[120] *History* 11/9.5-7.

[121] *History* 11/9.7-8: καὶ λίαν ἐγκωμιαζόμενός τε καὶ σεμνυνόμενος.

Maniakes as *katepanos* of Italy. After these early positive measures, negative elements follow: he decreed the exile of the Orphanotrophos and the castration of members of his own family. In the *Chronographia*, these two actions constitute the peak of Michael's tyranny, and the revelation of Michael's true *ethos.* In the *History,* these actions are indeed condemned, but are portrayed as an early overreaction of the ruler, which anticipated his later failure by triggering divine zeal against him, as the wisest men recognised.[122]

The narration jumps to a procession organised by the emperor. Krallis underlined how contemporary accounts, throughout this event, show the importance of public opinion of the emperor's policy.[123] Skylitzes indeed presented the procession as a survey of the people's opinion:

> By harping on the same theme they [Orphanotrophos and the *domestikos* Constantine] succeeded in persuading him [Michael V] to hatch a plot against her [Zoe]. He decided to sound out the people of the city first, to find out what their opinion of him might be. If there was evidence that they esteemed him and held him in affection, then he would put his plan into action; if not, he would keep quiet. So he proclaimed a public procession to the church of the Holy Apostles for the Sunday after Easter, judging that in this way he could test the climate of public opinion.[124]

All this information is missing in Attaleiates account. The *History* presents the procession as an appropriate spectacle corresponding to the feast day of Holy Easter, without any mention of an underlying political intention. After a relatively lengthy description of the ceremony,[125] Attaleiates brings one detail to the audiences' attention: the emperor gives the order to start the procession slightly earlier than customary, when the streets were not yet completely crowded,

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[122] *History* 12/9.25-28: Καὶ τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον καταστρέψας, ἄφρονα ζῆλον προσφέρειν τοῖς συνετοῖς ἔδοξεν, ἐψιλωμένον ἑαυτὸν τοσαύτης συγγεικῆς βοηθείας ἀπεργασάμενος.

[123] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 38.

[124] *Synopsis* 417.94-6: καὶ συνεχεῖς τὰς προσβολὰς περὶ ταὐτοῦ ποιούμενοι πράγματος ἀναπεῖσαι ἴσχυσαν ἐπιβουλὴν κατ' αὐτῆς μελετῆσαι. ἔδοξεν οὖν αποπειραθῆναι τῶν πολιτῶν πρότερον, οἵαν ἔχουσι περὶ αὐτοῦ γνώμην, καὶ εἰ μὲν χρηστὴν διάθεσιν φανῶσι φυλάττονες εἰς αὐτὸν καὶ φιλίαν ὀρθήν, τότε δὴ καὶ ἐγχειρῆσαι τῇ μελέτῃ, εἰ δὲ τοὐναντίον, ἡσυχίαν κηρύξας ἐν τῷ τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων ναῷ, καὶ δι' αὐτῆς ἀποπειραθῆναι κρίνας τῆς γνώμης τῶν πολιτῶν.

[125] The 170 words dedicated to describe the procession follow 283 words since the account on Michael's reign began, becoming more than a third of the total number, 453 words. It thus constitutes a change in the pace of the story easy to spot for an audience.

which was considered a bad omen (καὶ οἰνὸς οὐκ ἀγαθὸς ἐδόκει το ἔξωρον) in the judgment of the wisest spectators (τοὺς συνετωτέρους τῶν θεατρῶν).[126] Again a bad omen was spotted by the most sagacious men. Therefore, the fact that Michael exiled Zoe after the inauspicious decision does not speak of Michael's misreading of the people's will, but as his disregard of the codes of behaviour supported by the divinity.

Subsequently in Attaleiates' account, the news of the empress' exile reached the people of the city, and their admiration of the spectacle turned into anger against the ruler. The mob's actions are aimed 'to depose from power that ungrateful and unfeeling man who had turned against his own benefactors and violated the most fearsome oaths', proving himself unworthy of sovereignty.[127] The mob open the gates of the prison, take the palace, and sack both the rich houses of the imperial family and even their churches and monasteries. Krallis presented the latter impious actions as an example of bottom-up social upheaval. However, while analysing Attaleiates' description of the mob's actions, it becomes apparent that additional detail to the story is intended to illustrate the punishment exercised over the sinful imperial family, who had profited unjustly. The churches built by these rich men were commissioned with 'the fruits of much injustice and the groans of the poor', so they were sacked 'as if they were cursed'.[128] The focus of the narrative is not on the people's capacity to carry out a political agenda, but rather on the divinely-inspired retribution for the emperor's misdoings.

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[126] *History* 13/10.18-21.

[127] *History* 15/12.10-14: τὸν ἀχάριστον καὶ ἀγνώμονα περὶ τὴν εὐεργέτιν καὶ ἀδικίαν κατὰ τῶν φρισκωδεστάτων ὅρκων πεποικότα τῆς ἀρχῆς καθελεῖν.

[128] *History* 15/12.23-26; for the paraphrased text, contained within these lines: ἐξεφόδου πατήρειπον καὶ τὸν πλοῦτον πολλοῖς ἀδικήμασι καὶ στεναγμοῖς πενήτων ἀποτεθησαυρισμένον ἐξήντλουν, ὡς ἐναγῆ ἐβεβήλωντό τε καὶ διηρπάζοντο. I deviated again from the English translation for this passage: ἐναγῆ is translated here as 'curse' instead of 'pollution', for similar reasons as in the previous note; the act of 'destroying churches' may be linked to the notion of unclean money, that should not be touched: see F. Dvornik, *La vie de saint Grégoire le Décapolite et les Slaves macédoniens au IXe siècle* (Paris 1926) 559; I van del Gheyn, 'Acta Graeca SS. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mytilenae in insula Lesbo', *Analecta Bollandiana* 18 (1899) 209-259, esp. 245.; A. Laiou, 'Economic Thought and Ideology', in A. Laiou, (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh Through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC 2002) 1131-1132.

A group of rebels entered the Hagia Sophia and forced the patriarch to take the side of 'the heir and lady, who was suffering the worst injustice from a latecomer and whose reward for her greatest benefaction was a foul outrage'.[129] Attaleiates presents the capture of Michael by the mob and his later blinding with the declaration 'Justice did not long postpone his punishment'.[130] Finally, once the emperor and his uncle the *nobelissimos* had been blinded and retired to a monastery, the narrator closed the chapter with a concluding sentence: '[the blind Michael V and the *nobelissimos*] became a sad tale for the further generations, and a correcting model to the better to those who wish to be ungrateful towards their benefactors'.[131]

In the narrative composed by Attaleiates, the mob represented a destructive force, mostly intended to avenge injustice. The emperor's sin is repeatedly cited as the main reason for the mob's persistence. The popular upheaval disappeared from the narrative as soon as punishment fell upon the emperor and his uncle. Zoe is represented as the depositary of imperial legitimacy, but the narration focuses on how she became Michael's benefactor by inviting him to the throne, and how he forgot gratitude when he decided on her exile. Psellos focused on the failure of Michael's family to remain in power; Attaleiates, on Michael's sinful action with regard to Zoe. While Krallis focused on strategic faults in Michael's actions before his doom, related to the emperor's management of the people's desires, Attaleiates concentrated on the relevance of the omens and signs that predicted God's disapproval. This reading from the narrative leads the audience to perceive the mob as a tool of a morally-driven force, namely

[129] *History* 15-16/12.28-13.3: ἐκβιαζόμενοι τὴν κληρονόμον καὶ δέσποιναν μὴ περιιδεῖν τὰ ἔσχατα πάσχουσαν ἀδίκως παρὰ τοῦ ἐπεισάκτου καὶ ἀντὶ τῆς μεγίστης εὐεργεσίας ὕβριν παθοῦσαν ἀνήσκετον; I translated δέσποιναν as 'lady', instead of 'empress'.

[130] *History* 17/14.2-3: Ἀλλ' ἡ δίκη τὴν καταδίκην αὐτῷ οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀνεβάλετο. Note the word game used by Attaleiates, in italics. The attention given to ἡ δίκη here again underlines the moral misstep of the emperor as the cause of his downfall, instead of other sort of strategic interpretations of the event. We can also compare the poignant prominence of ἡ δίκη as the subject who realises the action, in a context where most of the sentences are in passive voice, having the emperor and the *nobelissimos* as their subjects who are exposed to the actions of an abstract subject, as seen in note 13; on word games and narrative rhythm, see pages 250-261 below.

[131] *History* 17/14.13-15: διήγημα γενόμενοι σκυθρωπὸν τοῖς μετέπειτα καὶ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον ἐπανόρθωσις τῶν ἀγνωμονεῖν ἐθελόντων πρὸς τοὺς εὐεργετήσαντας; I introduced small alterations in the English translation, reinforcing the existing link between the emperor's behaviour and divine retribution.

the divinity or, in other terms, destiny.[132] This reading of the passage has the advantage of linking this story with Attaleiates' focus on moral retribution throughout the History. The people's violence against Michael V could be regarded as similar to Constantine IX's premature death, Isaak's likely punishment in hell, or Romanos' loss at Manzikert.[133]

3.4.2. The rebellion of Raidestos

Towards the end of Michael's reign, a number of rebellions sprouted across the empire. Nikephoros Botaneiates rebelled in the east and Nikephoros Bryennios rose in the west, while locally organised uprisings are also mentioned by Attaleiates. Among these, the rebellion in Raidestos receives most attention in the *History*, a town where Attaleiates resided at that time.[134] Krallis argued that the author's views of the rebellion point to a second case of the people taking the initiative in the *History*.[135] This time Attaleiates identifies a clear leader for the mob: Vatatzina, the wife of a local aristocrat named Vatatzes.[136] Krallis justifies her presence in the narrative as a result of her role in Attaleiates' escape from the city;[137] the narrative is, from Krallis' perspective, focused on appreciating the unity of the political body of the town. The mob at Raidestos therefore is characterised as an actor within the *History*.[138]

In order to discuss the audience's possible views on Attaleiates' account of the rebellion, it is helpful to contextualise the episode, first in relation to earlier references to the *kastron* of Raidestos in the *History*, and also in relation to the larger narrative arc in which the rebellion is framed, namely the despotic reign of Michael VII and the later rebellions of

[132] M. Hinterberger, 'Φόβω κατασεισθείς: τα πάθη του ανθρώπου και της αυτοκρατορίας στο Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτη. Το αιτιολογικό σύστημα ενός ιστοριογράφου του 11ου αιώνα', in V. N. Vlyssidou (ed.), *The Empire in Crisis (?) Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025-1081)* (Athens 2003) esp. 157-158.
[133] *History* 51/40.32-41.3, 70/55.18-56.10, 143-146/111.3-113.30.
[134] Attaleiates' detailed account of the events taking place at Raidestos possibly derive from his familiarity with the town. Psellos does not mention this rebellion, since his account of Michael's government is relatively brief and encomiastic. Bryennios does not mention the rebellion, since his focus is on Alexios' feats in the battlefield.
[135] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 44-46.
[136] *History* 248/191.10.
[137] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 45.
[138] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 45-46.

Botaneiates and Bryennios. From that perspective, Attaleiates' description of the rebellion matches a number of recurrent messages from the *History*: the promotion of greed and selfishness by the person at the apex of the imperial administration are the cause of the catastrophic situation during Michael's reign. Also, in his narration of the Raidestos rebellion, Attaleiates has a chance to clarify his role in the events.

Raidestos is mentioned only briefly before the account reaches the reign of Michael VII.[139] Afterwards, Attaleiates narrated the construction of the *phoundax* in Raidestos,[140] a building where all the incoming grain had to be collected and sold according to prices decreed by the authorities.[141] The story of the *poundax* and its negative impact in the economy of the region is 'engulfed' by the description of the administrative fiascos orchestrated by the emperor's right hand man, Nikephoritzes. That is not the first time that the audience hears about Nikephoritzes. Attaleiates presented the character right at the beginning of Michael's sole reign, underlining his destructive influence over the ruler and the empire. Attaleiates introduced him after the following declaration: 'a weed was mixed in with the quality grain [Matt.13:25-40] or, to put differently, that when night arrived day necessarily had to retreat'.[142] Attaleiates presented him as a eunuch 'who was most capable at devising and tailoring affairs and bringing about great commotion in any situation'.[143] A short biography follows, noting every calamity he provoked while serving previous rulers, while labelling him as an unreliable, jealous individual, filled with hate.[144] He was recalled from exile by Emperor Michael 'to the detriment

[139] Raidestos is first mentioned as the only city (πόλις) that bravely resisted Leon Tornikios' rebel forces thus aggravating his situation right before his ultimate downfall (28/23.11-20). It was also mentioned, just by name, as one of the many cities affected by the earthquake in 1063 (89/71.16).
[140] *History* 201-204/155.23-158.3.
[141] *History* 244-246/187.28-189.25 for the episode, and 248-249/191.9-192.6 for the rebellion.
[142] *History* 180/139.21-23: ἀλλ' ἔμελλε πάντως τῷ εὐγενεῖ τοῦ σίτου παραμιγῆναί τι καὶ ζιζάνιον ἢ τῇ τῆς νυκτὸς ἀπιφοιτήσει τὴν ἡμέραν ἀναγκαίως ὑποχωρῆσαι.
[143] *History* 180/139.24-26: δεινὸς ἐπινοῆσαι καὶ ῥάψαι πράγματα καὶ πολλὴν τῇ καταστάσει τὴν τρικυμίαν ἐπενεγκεῖν.
[144] *History* 180-182/139.26-140.28.

of the Roman state'.[145] Nikephoritzes profited from the immaturity of the emperor in order to execute his plans, which included colliding with other members of the Byzantine elite, turning the emperor against his family and closest associates, and finally using the imperial Treasury unjustly and for his own profit.[146]

Two points are especially noteworthy here. On the one hand, Nikephoritzes' character and deeds relate to the key elements criticised by Attaleiates throughout the book: greed, injustice, and disorder. Actions inspired by these elements are met by laments and anger from the victims,[147] and by a corresponding divine punishment: following Attaleiates' description of Nikephoritzes' policies, 'a God-driven wrath fell upon the east'.[148] Secondly, even though Nikephoros receives a fair amount of attention in the text, the ultimate responsibility for the wrongdoings falls upon Michael's shoulders: his lack of judgment, immaturity,[149] and his nature[150] are the basis of Nikephoritzes' influence over him and the empire. Attaleiates' further mentions of Raidestos in the *History* will be linked to this principle.

The first of the three episodes in Raidestos correspond to the third mention of Nikephoritzes in the story. The emperor is depicted as indifferent to the Turkish raids in the east,[151] while the Latin general Rouselios faced the Turks heroically. Nikephoritzes influenced the emperor to be angry at Rouselios' feats. Then Michael reached an agreement with the Turks, who captured Rouselios after feigning friendship with him. Thereafter, the Turkish raids reached Chalkedon and Chrysopolis, on the opposite side of the Bosporus strait, to which Michael reacted once again with indifference.[152] Attaleiates then refers for a second time to

[145] *History* 182/140.28-141.1. τοῦτον ἐπὶ κακῷ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς μεταπεμψάμενος.
[146] *History* 182-183/141.1-20.
[147] *History* 183/141.19-20: φισκοσυνηγορίαι πολλαὶ καὶ θρῆνος τῶν πασχόντων καὶ σκυθρωπότης οὔτι μικρά.
[148] *History* 183/141.21-22: θεήλατός τις ὀργὴ τὴν ἑῴαν κατέλαβεν.
[149] *History* 182/141.5-6: οἷα φρονήματος ἀμοιρῶν σταθηροῦ καὶ μειρακιωδῶν ἀθυρμάτων μὴ ἀποδέων.
[150] *History* 184/142.23-24: μηδὲ αὐτός, ὡς ἐφάνη, τὴν φύσιν ἔχων τοῖς συμβουλευομένοις ἀντίθετον.
[151] *History* 198/153.8-17.
[152] *History* 198-200/153.17-154.22.

how Nikephoritzes turned the emperor against his relatives and enriched himself from his advantageous position, distributing honours in exchange for rewards and profiting from a monastery on his property.[153]

Then Attaleiates moves the scene to Raidestos, where there is a prosperous grain trade, mostly directed to monastic foundations and Hagia Sophia itself. When Nikephoritzes learnt about this, he envied the town's wealth and decided to profit from that trade, so he built a *phoundax* where all carts full of grain should assemble before entering the town to be sold at a fixed price. That decision met God's rage and impoverished the land, as Attaleiates eloquently described.[154] He noted how the people from the area surrounding Raidestos fell into poverty. Those who collaborated in the erection of the *phoundax* in their hope to profit from the collective disgrace also felt the consequences, Attaleiates noted. He finally concluded that the injustice committed with the *phoundax* boosted the people's discontent, and then moved to comment on rebellions from other cities, this time along the shores of the Danube, also as a result of Nikephoritzes unjust measures against their revenues.[155]

The analysis of the elements that build up to the rebellion of Raidestos in the narrative leads me to different conclusions from those of Krallis. Attaleiates presented the insurrection as retribution for Michael's administration, a misguided policy marked by personal greed and ignorance. That the emphasis is not on the people's actions is clear when, despite having provided enough justification for the town to rebel, Attaleiates delegitimises the rebellion afterwards. Instead of developing a narrative based on the legitimate causes and celebration of a popular uprising against injustice, Attaleiates first portrays the people of Raidestos as a victim of Michael's tyranny, and later presents the insurrection as illegitimate, since he had run away

[153] *History* 200-201/154.23-155.23.
[154] The description of the practice of purchasing grain in the town of Raidestos has received remarkable interest by scholars: I. Pérez Martín, 'El análisis económico en la 'Historia' de Miguel Ataliates', *Revista de historiografía* 3 (2005) 174-180; A. Laiou and C. Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge 2007) 135-136.
[155] *History* 204-205/158.1-12.

from it, and the rebels supported the later opponent of Botaneiates to the throne, Nikephoros Bryennios.

Attaleiates uses several elements to delegitimise the rebellion at Raidestos. First he introduces the rebellion as unexpected: Attaleiates himself stays in Raidestos expecting a 'rational' response from the citizens.[156] Vatatzes' wife comes onto the scene immediately afterwards, as the feminine, irrational character who disrupted the town's tranquillity, moved by a selfish ambition. Attaleiates mentioned Vatatzina's husband's kinship with the rebel Bryennios only as secondary to her impulsive desires when explaining her decision.[157] Therefore, Vatatzina's leadership of the rebellion was used by Attaleiates both to further delegitimise the uprising and to support his decision to head back to the capital.[158]

In a later reference to the rebels at Raidestos, Attaleiates reiterated the leading position of Vatatzes' wife in spearheading the rebellion, which again must be considered an element of subversion.[159] The rebels' first measure was destroying the aforementioned *phoundax*, 'that universal insult and injustice, the *logothetes'* horrible invention', a note which may remind the audience who was responsible for the rebellion in the first place.[160] The following decisions taken by the insurgents are less sympathetic: they captured the fort of Panion, while the rebel soldiers, mostly foreigners and supported by Vatatzina, masked their plundering of the surrounding fields with excuses of guarding the fort.[161] Moreover, while the rebels were fortifying the port while expecting an attack by sea, they destroyed many dwellings: 'simply put, everything was in great turmoil and confusion'.[162] Whereas Krallis considers that the

[156] *History* 244/187.28-188.11.
[157] *History* 244-245/188.11-16.
[158] *History* 245/188.27-189.2.
[159] *History* 245/188.11-16. Vatatzina's irrational attitude in support of the violent soldiers appears later in the narrative: 249/191.23-25.
[160] *History* 248-249/191.11-16: 248-249/191.12-16: τὸ κοινὸν ἀτόπημα καὶ ἀδίκημα καὶ τοῦ ἀπὸ λογοθετῶν δύστηνον ἐπινόημα καὶ τῇ εὐθηνίᾳ ἐπιβουλεῦον.
[161] *History* 249/191.16-25.
[162] *History* 249/191.25-192.2.

narrator sympathised with the rebellion,[163] the contrast between Attaleiates' applause for the destruction of the *phoundax* and his later comments shows where he wishes to direct the audience's attention: not towards the rebellion itself, but towards Michael, Bryennios, and the author's own actions at that time.

Krallis used the aforementioned examples to ask whether 'Attaleiates truly considered the possibility of a legitimate political role for the demos'.[164] Conversely, it seems unlikely to me that the intended audience of the *History* had these considerations in mind. Attaleiates did include in his narration these two dramatic scenes of popular rage, but he directed the attention to the emperors who provoked these uprisings, and the divine punishment they received. The two episodes constituted a minuscule section of the *History*. But more relevant than the weight of the number of words is the way in which these episodes interact with the wider arguments of the *History*, a story focused on naturalised codes of behaviour that entail divine retribution; values which are gradually lost, mostly as a result of the poisonous influence of immoral rulers, but are finally recovered by Botaneiates when he ascended the throne. The emperor is still at the centre of the narrative, eventually followed by Nikephoritzes, and definitely by the narrator, as the following section will discuss further.

3.5. The narrator as a character

The insertion of the narrator inside his own story ('internal narrator') is a noteworthy feature in the middle and late Byzantine historical accounts. The histories that preceded the eleventh century, and the Classical models Byzantine authors seem to follow, generally say little about their authors, even less about their author's role in the historical affairs they were narrating.[165]

[163] Krallis, 'Democratic Action', 44: 'personal economic interests and political opinions aside, Attaleiates cast a sympathetic eye on the rebelled city, even though its citizens looted his property treating him as an enemy of their cause'
[164] Krallis 'Democratic Action', 52.
[165] I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Miguel Ataliates y Miguel Pselo (Ensayo de una breve comparación)', *Erytheia* 16 (1995) 94; comparing the Byzantine insertion of the narrative's author in the account; R. Scott, 'The Classical Tradition in

In the more 'traditional' *Synopsis* and its *Continuation*, the author's character is completely absent from the narrative. The situation varies in the *History* and, more famously, the *Chronographia*. Both narratives represented their respective narrators, Psellos and Attaleiates, as characters in action. More important for the understanding of the different accounts and their political discourse, these internal narrators do not only play a role in legitimising or criticising the ruler. Psellos and Attaleiates, when represented in their accounts, are characters standing on their own in their stories, although not sitting on the throne. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the different messages the intended audience may have received from the episodes when these authors shift from an authoritative, narrative voice, to that of an engaged historical character.

3.5.1. Psellos as an internal narrator in the *Chronographia*

The prominence of Psellos in his own account has been studied thoroughly by scholars, following the pioneering study by Ruth Macrides.[166] Psellos' prominence in his own story is justified in a number of ways. Firstly, Psellos' near-omnipresence at the Constantinopolitan court for most of the period covered by the *Chronographia* is something he profited from, claiming to share intimate knowledge of key historical events.[167] Psellos' proximity to most of the rulers described imbued an otherwise controversial prose with an air of veracity. For

Byzantine Historiography', in M. Mullett and R. Scott, *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham 1981) 61-74.

[166] R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C. N. Constantinides, N. M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys and A. D. Angelou (eds.), *Philellen: studies in honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996), 205-224; applied to Psellos' philosophical commentaries of Aristotle: K. Ierodiakonnou, 'The Self-Concious Style of Some Byzantine Philosophers (11th–14th Century)', in C. Angelidi (ed.), *Byzantium Matures: Choices, Sensitivities and Modes of Expression* (Athens 2004) 100-101 and 107-110; E. Pietsch, 'Αυτοβιογραφικά καί απολογητικά στοιχεία στήν ιστοριογραφία: Ή Χρονογραφία τού Μιχαήλ Ψελλού', in P. Odorico, P.A. Agapitos, and M. Hinterberger (eds.), *L'écriture de la mémoire. La littérarité de l'historiographie. Actes du IIIe colloque international philologique "EPMHNEIA", Nicosie 6-7-8 mai 2004* (Paris 2006) 267-280; Neville, *Heroes and Romans*, 173-193 constitutes a useful reflection, focused in the historical accounts of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene, on how personal self-promotion and didactic goals may combine in the work of middle Byzantine historians; Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 2 even counted the number of times Psellos referred to himself in throughout his oeuvre.

[167] J. Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía en la historia: algunas consideraciones sobre los géneros literarios en la Cronografía de Miguel Pselo', in V. Valcárcel Martínez (ed.), *Las biografías griega y latina como género literario: de la Antigüedad al Renacimiento. Algunas calas* (Vitoria 2009) 195 argues that the *Chronographia* is articulated according to Psellos' lived experiences.

example, at the moment of Michael V' downfall, Psellos claimed to be among the mob who seized the emperor and blinded him. While the dramatic end of this emperor is briefly referred to in the *History* (162 words maximum) and the *Synopsis* (288 words maximum), Psellos extended his account in this matter (1515 words approximately), including dialogues and other contemporary details.[168] Psellos' presence in the narrative, either as a spectator in a military parade or as an insider at the court, allows him to produce convincing arguments, concerning the emperors' characters and, eventually, the causes of their downfalls.[169]

Psellos' presence as a court member also allowed him to reassure his audience of his status as a worthy intellectual. For example, Psellos' account of the emperor's diseases implicitly brings to the audience's attention his knowledge of medicine.[170] Throughout the narrative, Psellos represents himself as an ideal advisor who knows the path to political success, even contrasting his expertise with the short sightedness of his fellow court members. His first apparition as a member of the imperial administration, during the reign of Michael V, depicts a Psellos in charge of 'the more confidential despatches'. From that vantage position, Psellos describes the rebellion, and explains to his audience why he knew it was a matter to be worried about:[171]

> To most people, this deed looked to be some novelty that made no sense, but I perceived, from what I had seen before and from things I had heard, that the spark had been excited into a fire, and that many rivers and a fast-flowing current were necessary to put it out, I mounted my horse at once, went through the midst of the city and saw with my own eyes things which now I can hardly believe.[172]

[168] *History* 17/13.26-14.15; *Synopsis* 420.74-421.7; *Chronographia* 5.38-50.
[169] *Chronographia* 3.25 on Psellos' impressions of Romanos Argyros' illness; 4.50 for Michael IV's aspect in the latter stages of his sickness. I will develop the importance of diseases in Psellos' political message in chapter characterisation.
[170] *Chronographia* 7.74.
[171] *Chronographia* 5.27 τινας τῶν μυστικωτέρων ὑπαγορεύοντα.
[172] *Chronographia* 5.27: 5.27.12-17: τοῖς μὲν οὖν πολλοῖς, καινοτομία τίς ἄλογος τὸ πραττόμενον ἔδοξεν. ἐγὼ δὲ συνεὶς, ἐξ ὧν πρότερον τὰ μὲν, ἑωράκειν· τὰ δὲ, ἠκηκόειν, ὡς εἰς πυρκαιὰν ὁ σπινθὴρ ἀνεφλέχθη· καὶ δεῖ πολλῶν ποταμῶν· καὶ ἐπιφόρου τοῦ ῥεύματος, ὥστε ἀποσβεσθῆναι, αὐτίκα τὸν ἵππον ἀναβὰς, διὰ μέσης ᾖειν τῆς Πόλεως· καὶ γε τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῖς ἑωράκειν, περὶ ὧν νῦν ἔπεισί μοι ἀμφισβητεῖν.

Applauded rulers like Isaak Komnenos or his successor Constantine X listen to his advice,[173] while those emperors who failed can be accused of not having listened to what Psellos had to say.[174]

Psellos' did not only promote himself as an ideal advisor, but as an attractive, empathetic persona.[175] When Psellos argues, for example, that Constantine IX became attracted by the eloquence of Psellos' tongue, the audience is made to consider Psellos' sensuality as well.[176] Michael VI asked Psellos to become his ambassador due to his eloquence – 'I taste the honey of your lips' concluded the emperor.[177] Back again to the deposition and blinding of Michael V, Psellos described how the miserable position of the former emperor moved him to tears.[178] He probably hoped to move the audience as well, evoking what would be a terrible situation for most of them: a rebellion in the city, chaos in the streets, and an emperor being blinded together with his family.[179] Numerous examples would follow: the court stories during the reign of Constantine Monomachos could be understood not only as a didactic example of a flawed administration, but also as a collection of intimate court extravagances.[180]

However, Psellos' fame among the Byzantine court of the third quarter of the eleventh century likely comprised some elements that, for some among the audience, were hardly a matter of applause. Outside the *Chronographia*, we have access to extant, epistolary evidence,

[173] *Chronographia* 7.30, 7.41-42, and 7b.7.
[174] For example, disregarding Psellos' advice is argued in the *Chronographia* as one of the main causes of Michael VI's fall: *Chronographia* 7.11.
[175] Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, esp. 232.
[176] *Chronographia* 6.45.
[177] *Chronographia* 7.16.7-8: καί σου τοῦ χειλέων ... ὁσημέραι ἀπογεύομαι μέλιτος.
[178] *Chronographia* 5.40.
[179] J. Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford 2015) 12-15.
[180] One example is the description of Zoe's image of Christ, which was used as if the image itself were alive: *Chronographia* 6.66-67; see also J. Duffy, 'Reactions of two Byzantine Intellectuals to the Theory and Practice of Magic: Michael Psellos and Michael Italikos', in H. Maguire, *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, DC 1995) 88-90 for a subversive reading of Zoe's *antiphonetus* image; C. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2007) 83-85 for an alternative interpretation, closer to Psellos Neoplatonic and Christian tradition.

concerning different accusations directed towards Psellos, and how he defended himself.[181] Psellos' presence in the narrative also served as a platform to justify his own actions, shielded from past, present, and potential accusations.[182] When Psellos and some of his colleagues abandoned the court of Constantine Monomachos, he presents this decision as a matter of life or death. Psellos is persuaded by Monomachos to remain: the emperor called him 'his eyes', and 'remedy of his soul', 'his heart and light', and 'his life', and begged him not to leave him in darkness.[183]

Additionally, Psellos' account of Isaak Komnenos' rebellion against Michael VI mostly recounts his personal experience as an ambassador to the rebel Isaak. The narrative focus is overwhelmingly centred on the figure of Psellos himself: he legitimises Isaak as a rightful emperor but, above all, he legitimises his own difficult position in the middle ground of a civil war. Skylitzes recounts in his *Synopsis* that the decisive element for the rebellion to triumph was the collaboration between the rebels inside the capital, led by the patriarch Keroularios, and the ambassadors who moved between the capital and the rebel's camp, led by Psellos himself:

> It is also said that the ambassadors went against their master by each one of them coming secretly to Kekaumenos, one at a time, urging him to maintain his opposition and not to concede one jot or tittle … they told Komnenos himself on their oath that the entire urban multitude was on his side; that the only need

[181] Perhaps the best known example is Psellos' response to Patriarch Keroularios' accusations of heresy. Less known perhaps it Psellos' response in verse to a monk from the monastery of Mount Olympus that Psellos had just left, since the situation at court was again safe for him. When the monk accused him of not being able to bear Mount Olympus without the company of his goddesses (2 verses), Psellos replied with 321 lines of fulminating rhetoric: *Poesía lúdico-satírica bizantina del siglo XI*, ed. and trans. M.T. Amado Rodriguez and B. Ortega Villaro (Madrid 2016) 202-249.

[182] Psellos' awareness of potential accusations as a result of composing the *Chronographia* are apparent in his account on Constantine Monomachos. Psellos added a sort of *prooimion* at the beginning of the sixth book for that purpose (6.22-28), explaining his reasons for producing the account and the imperatives of objectivity comprised in the historical genre. His point is that the accusations that he is about to direct at Constantine's regime do not constitute treason to his former patron, but an example of historical rigour.

[183] *Chronographia* 6.198.6-8: ὀφθαλμόν τε γὰρ ἀπεκάλει· καὶ ἴαμα τῆς ἐκείνου ψυχῆς· σπλάγχνον τε καὶ φῶς· καὶ ζωὴν· καὶ παρεκάλει μὴ τετυφλῶσθαι.

> approach the city and they would expel the old man, receiving *him* with triumphal songs and hymns. And that is what is said to have been taking place in the camp.[184]

Skylitzes' account, quite possibly derived from an account written by Kekaumenos himself,[185] offers an insight into what was commented at court regarding Psellos' role in the war, namely that he was a traitor to his master, the emperor Michael. Psellos, however, represents himself first as a reasonable advisor to Michael VI, and then as someone fully unaware of the rebel's devious machinations inside the capital. He uses several narrative devices to underline his unawareness and thus his innocence. While at the court of the emperor Michael, Psellos persistently presented himself and the court loyal to Michael as an entity – presented in the first person plural – opposed to a number of traitors, who are held responsible for Michael's downfall.[186] Michael himself comments that he does not trust members of the senate, thus the narrator implies that they these were the ones who ultimately caused his downfall.[187] Psellos repeatedly points at the danger he is accepting by becoming ambassador of Michael, and mentions the patriotism of his colleagues in the embassy as they accepted such a challenge.[188] Then he depicted himself confronting the rebels and reproaching their decision, risking his own safety.[189] As the meeting between the ambassadors and the rebels goes on, Psellos shows how his rhetoric softens the rebels and forces them to consider a pacific resolution for the conflict, just as Psellos ventured earlier in the account.[190] Psellos transformed an army who shouted acclamations to Isaak in perfect order and harmony, into a confused group whose voices no longer reflected a solid resolution.[191] Finally, Psellos arranged a pact between Michael and

[184] *Synopsis* 497.11-18: λέγεται δ', ὅτι καὶ οἱ πρεσβευταὶ παραπρεσβεύσαντες, ἄλλοτε ἄλλος λάθρᾳ τῷ Κεκαυμένῳ προσιόντες, παρεκάλουν ἔχεσθαι τῆς ἐνστάσεως καὶ μηδ' ὅλως ἐνδοῦναι …. καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν Κομνηνὸν πληροφοροῦντες ἐνωμότως, ὡς ἅπαν τὸ ἀστικὸν πλῆθος περικαῶς εἰς αὐτὸν ἔχει, καὶ ὡς, εἰ μόνον ἐγγίσει τῇ πόλει, τὸν γέροντα ἐξωθήσαντες μετ' ἐπινικίων καὶ ὕμνων αὐτὸν προσδέξονται. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν γενέσθαι λέγεται ἐπὶ στρατοπέδου.
[185] Here I am following guidance of the forthcoming publication by J. Shepard 'Memoirs as Manifesto'.
[186] *Chronographia* 7.11, 7.14,
[187] *Chronographia* 7.33.
[188] *Chronographia* 7.15-19.
[189] *Chronographia* 7.31, on the importance of exposing oneself to danger, see page 203 below.
[190] *Chronographia* 7.14.
[191] *Chronographia* 7.23 and 7.31.

Isaak. When the rebel was about to peacefully join the emperor Michael in Constantinople, then Psellos and Isaak were informed that a coup had dethroned Michael.[192] To this news Psellos claims to have reacted with fear: he defended the former emperor's cause so well that now he expected to be assassinated by the rebels: 'how my fellow-ambassadors passed that night I cannot say, but to me life seemed hopeless'. [193]

As a new day begins, the narrative reaches a jubilant conclusion. Isaak is received in Constantinople as new emperor, and named Psellos president of the senate, acknowledging his worth and the truth contained in his words.[194] The passage seems to encompass simultaneously a didactic purpose on the virtues and defects of rulers and subjects, their fates tied to their trust in Psellos, a dramatic retelling, and a compelling defence of Isaak and especially Psellos himself.

The second part of the *Chronographia* is not very far from its first part in respect to Psellos' narrative voice and his personal agenda.[195] He arguably kept a cordial relation with the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes up to the disaster at Manzikert.[196] However, after the military disaster at Manzikert, Psellos remained close to Michael VII Doukas. Psellos' later hostility to Romanos contrasts to some extent with the adulatory tone of his previous letters, possibly in the same manner as his account on Constantine IX clashed with earlier encomiastic texts and public declamations. Perhaps that is the reason why Psellos, instead of depicting Romanos as completely indifferent to his good advice, did completely the opposite. Romanos adopts a servile attitude towards Psellos in the *Chronographia*:

> When he was placed in the order of the private citizens, he acted towards me with extreme servitude, and he enjoyed my alliance and other things. He did not forgot

[192] *Chronographia* 7.35-37.
[193] *Chronographia* 7.38.1-3: ὅπως μὲν οὖν οἱ συμπρέσβεις ἐκείνην δὴ τὴν νύκτα διεληλύθεισαν, οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν· ἐμοὶ δὲ ἀπειρητέον ἡ ζωὴ ἔδοξεν.
[194] *Chronographia* 7.41-42.
[195] On the differences between the two parts of the *Chronographia*, composed around 1059 and 1073 respectively, see pages; also F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano'.
[196] E. de Vries-van der Velden, 'Psellos, Romain IV Diogénès et Mantzikert', *BSl* 58.2 (1997) 274-308.

> this when he was honoured with kingship, but loved and honoured me so much that he stood up when I came closer and, he offered me the most prominent place in the familiarity towards him.[197]

Immediately afterwards, Psellos explains Romanos' decision to campaign against the Turks as a combination of egotism and ill advice offered by other court members.[198] As a result of this discourse, Psellos rewrites his relation with Romanos. He is therefore able to profit from his former intimacy with Romanos, explaining the failure of his advice to the emperor, and maintaining his own position as legitimate at all times.

3.5.2. Attaleiates as an internal narrator in the *History*

Michael Attaleiates has been negatively compared with Psellos, also in the case of self-representation.[199] While Psellos appears constantly in the narrative, Attaleiates does so sparingly. Undoubtedly, this smaller presence in the text has to do with elements mostly out of the narrator's control: Attaleiates' role in the Byzantine court seemed more discreet than Psellos'. His role as an internal narrator, and close associate of the emperor, was restricted to his presence in Romanos Diogenes' three campaigns in the eastern provinces[200] and his flight from the rebellion in Raidestos.[201] These two insertions of Attaleiates in the narrative represent respectively the author's self-promotion as a proud Roman doing his duty at Manzikert, and the narrator's attempt to justify a potentially reproachable action: joining Michael's court in Constantinople while rebellions were rising against the tyrant across the country, Botaneiates' insurrection among them.

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[197] *Chronographia* 7b.11.1-6: ὅτε γὰρ μετὰ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν ἐτέτακτο, δουλοπρεπέστατα πρός με διέκειτο· καί τινος καὶ παρ' ἐμοῦ συμμαχίας ἀπολελαύκει. καὶ ὃς οὐκ ἐπελέληστο ταύτης, τῆς βασιλείας ἀξιωθεὶς· ἀλλ' ἠγάπά τε καὶ ἐσέβετο τοσοῦτον, ὡς καὶ ὑπανίστασθαί μοι προσιόντι· καὶ τὰ πρῶτα χαρίσασθαι τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν οἰκειώσεως.
[198] *Chronographia* 7b.12.
[199] Ljubarskij 'Ataliates y Pselo', 86.
[200] *History* 112-113/88.32-89.1; 120-121/94.25-95.10; 128-131/100.28-103.2; 152-153/118.10-28; 158-159/122.24-123.6; 162/125.23-25; 167/129.5-15.
[201] *History* 244-246/187.28-189.25; 249/192.2-5; smaller mentions of Attaleiates as a character in the narrative include him receiving historical information from the emperor Romanos IV (97-98/77.22-23), befriending the *protovestes* Basileios Maleses (188/145.16-18), visiting Crete (228/176.6-7), acting as a judge (98/78.8-9; 256/196.27-197.2) and presenting an oration to Botaneiates (292/224.23-24).

In his appearances on the scene, Attaleiates has the occasion to present himself as an honourable court member, a reliable advisor, and a political character with a clean career. He finds a way to promote his persona throughout the *History* by referring to his knowledge and his prestigious court titles. These elements both play a role at the very beginning of the *History*.[202] The dedication of the *History* to Botaneiates is headed by the author's name and court titles, and followed by statements that both applaud the emperor's feats and defend the value of Attaleiates' work. For this purpose, the abilities praised in Botaneiates gradually move from his famous military prowess, followed by his philanthropic values, to his interest in 'the work of letters', praised as 'an irresistible beauty that leads to the completion of one ordered world or, to put it more truthfully, a glory that transcends the world'.[203] Attaleiates leads the dedication to a point where he clearly has something to offer.

Throughout the *History*, Attaleiates repeatedly presents the causes of the historical events – from strategic decisions to omens and diverse signs – as predictable by wise people.[204] As he narrates the events and their causes, Attaleiates includes himself among that intellectual elite. Attaleiates also persuades the audience via his dramatic digressions. These play their part in the narrative by clarifying the narrator's position towards a specific event, and by triggering the audience's emotions to experience sorrow, anger or joy. The authorial persona rising from

[202] F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'A Narrative Approach on the Dedication of Michael Attaleiates' *History* to the Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates', in A. Theodoraki (ed.), *Πρακτικά 9ου Συνεδρίου Μεταπτυχιακών Φοιτητών και Υποψηφίων Διδακτόρων του Τμήματος Φιλολογίας. Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθήνων 4-7 Οκτωβρίου 2017: Βυζαντινή Φιλολογία* (Athens 2018) 62-85.

[203] *History* 4/4.5-7: 4/4.5-7: νύκτωρ δὲ τοῖς λόγοις φιλοπονῶν καὶ κάλλος ἀμήχανον ἑαυτῷ ἐξυφαίνων εἰς ἑνὸς κόσμου ἤ, τό γε ἀληθέστερον εἰπεῖν, ὑπερκοσμίου δόξης συμπλήρωσιν. Attaleiates' praise of Botaneiates' literary curiosity sharply contrasts with other accounts on the ruler, which has been noted by previous scholars: A. Kazhdan 'The social views of Michael Attaleiates', in A. Kazhdan and S. Franklin (eds.), *Studies on Byzantine Literature on the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984) 31; Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, 232 n. 12.

[204] Krallis reduced the importance of omens in Attaleiates' interpretation of historical events: Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 171-212. I rather side with Hinterberger, who underlines the importance of divine approval and destiny in defining the causality chain in the *History*: Hinterberger, 'Φόβω κατασεισθείς', 157-162.

the account is that of a reliable interpreter of past events, and an appealing and compelling orator.[205]

Attaleiates possibly promoted himself using his court titles to play an indirect role in the narrative. He cites previous court members who held his same titles in order to underline the reverence owed to these honours.[206] During the Pecheneg wars at the time of Constantine IX Monomachos, the army was led by Konstantinos the *praipositos*. Attaleiates explains the fatal outcome by contrasting the poor, selfish decision taken by the general – Attaleiates mentioned the general was a eunuch – to the advice offered by two subalterns: Michael Dokeianos and Arrianites. It does not seem coincidental that Attaleiates identified these characters as *vestarches* and *magistros*, two out of the three titles used by Attaleiates in the dedication of the *History*.[207] Since it was the eunuch who was in charge of the troops, the Romans were defeated, but the *vestarches* Dokeianos won a glorious death fighting the enemies until the end.[208] Thus, Attaleiates attributed courageous deeds to a man holding the same titles as him. It is worth noting that this story is immediately followed by an exposition of Botaneiates' glorious deeds: while the Roman army collapsed, Botaneiates kept his troops together, who supported each other instead of caring for their own survival, and thus prevailed.[209] As in the case of the

[205] Macrides, 'Historian in the History' 210: '[Attaleiates'] insertions [at the campaign of Manzikert] interrupt, punctuate and slow down the account, creating a sense of foreboding at the same time as they convey Attaleiates' witness to the signs of impending defeat'.
[206] The *Escurialensis* manuscript offers another clue of this 'honour among title-holders', as its calligraphy has been traced back to other manuscripts from the late eleventh century, *Patmiacus* 20 and *Vat. barber. gr* 462, whose copy was either executed or supervised by a fellow *krites tou velou*, Basil Anthas: H. Hunger, E. Gamillscheg, D. Harlfinger, *Repertorium der griechischen Kopisten 800-1600*, vol. 3 (Vienna 1997) item 66; G. Cavallo, 'Scritture informali, cambio grafico e pratiche librarie a Bisanzio tra I secoli XI a XII', in G. Prato (ed.), *I manoscritti greci tra riflessione e dibattito, Atti del V Colloquio Internazionale di Paleografia Greca (Cremona, 4-10 ottobre 1998)*, vol. 1 (Florence 2000) 219-238.
[207] *History* 34-35/27.23-28.20.
[208] *History* 34/28.18.
[209] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xliii pointed to this early reference to Botaneiates as a latter addition in the account, underlining a contrast between the author's rigorous historical account and the forced intrusion of his patron's deeds. However, even Skylitzes, who wrote his account in times of the ruler who dethroned Botaneiates, left a brief mention to Botaneiates' achievement in the battle. Attaleiates possibly developed previous accounts on Botaneiates' feat into the encomiastic account, seizing again the opportunity to make a reliable defence of his patron in a way that would not shatter the audience's confidence in the narrative.

dedication, a praiseworthy mention to Botaneiates here goes hand in hand with a self-representation of Attaleiates as a noble character and a worthy advisor.

All in all, despite the fewer insertions of the Attaleiates-character in the scene, his presence seems to fulfil the same goals as the presence of Psellos in the *Chronographia*. Therefore, when considering both the *Chronographia* and the *History* in terms of what character is pivotal to the events narrated, the narrator becomes a character that displaces prominence from the ruler, shifting the narrative focus onto himself. The authors' positions as internal narrators in the historical accounts not only enrich their depiction of the key historical events and their protagonists, but also reaffirm the narrators' prestige and the narratives' appeal to an intended audience. Even though the insertion of Attaleiates and, in particular, Psellos, in his own narratives seems a noteworthy development of eleventh-century Byzantine history writing, I read this development with caution. Instead of praising or condemning the insertion of the character *per se*, as has been done in the past, it is helpful to consider social explanations for this phenomenon: the 'discovery of the individual' is not necessarily a mark of modernity, but a change in the social conditions of history writing. Particularly in the case of Psellos, it seems inaccurate to read the *Chronographia* fundamentally as Psellos' *memoire*: even though the narrator's explicit voice is omnipresent in the narrative, his presence as a character is sparse during the first five books. There Psellos has focused his narrative in explaining the rise and fall of several rulers, linking his account to his personal life only indirectly.[210]

[210] The topic was discussed by Macrides, 'Historian in the History', 215 and 223-224; M. Angold, 'The autobiographical impulse in Byzantium', *DOP* 52 (1998) esp. 235-238; J. Signes Codoñer, *Miguel Pselo: Vidas de los Emperadores de Bizancio* (Madrid 2005) 22-23 even alluded to psychological trauma as a way to explain Psellos self-centeredness; then again, I suggest paying attention to Psellos' possible discourses about his own research, using his skills for didactic purposes, as discussed on pages 52-58 above.

3.6. Character making in the *Synopsis*: the distant emperor and Komnenian propaganda

John Skylitzes' *Synopsis of Histories* and its *Continuation* stand at times as exceptions to much of what has been discussed above. Many of the eleventh-century events narrated in Skylitzes seem not to be related to the description of any particular emperor, but to stand alone in the text. Following the death of Basil II, the reigns of his successors up to Constantine Monomachos – Constantine VIII, Romanos III, Michael IV and Michael V – still refer to the emperor as the central figure of the narrative in one way or another.[211] Once the *Continuation* begins in 1057, the narrative heavily relies on Attaleiates' account, hence his focus again on the imperial figure as Attaleiates did. For the reign of Constantine IX and the following civil war (the period 1042-1057) however, the story clearly divides into smaller anecdotes, where the main characters relate to imperial authority only in an indirect way. This is very likely a result of Skylitzes' adaptation of the 'Kekaumenos source', a no-longer-surviving account of Kekaumenos deeds written either by Kekaumenos or by someone from his entourage, aimed to serve as a protest against the general's dismissal from the circles of power.[212]

This feature of Skylitzes' account should not lead us to consider the *Synopsis* as a completely separate category of history writing. It instead invites us to re-examine how the points discussed above can apply to an account that has been traditionally considered as lacking a solid narrative voice. Shepard, in his recent study of the 'Kekaumenos source', underlined Skylitzes' soft editing of this account before including it in his *Synopsis*: one can clearly explain Skylitzes' focus on particular episodes just because the 'source K' covered them, essentially because Kekaumenos played a heroic role on them.[213] I agree with Shepard on the transparency of this section of the *Synopsis*: one can easily spot where the 'source K' is present, and what

[211] See pages 181-185 below for a discussion on this topic.
[212] J. Shepard, 'A Suspected Source of Scylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*: The Great Catacalon Cecaumenus', *BMGS* 16 (1992) 171-181.
[213] Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', esp. 190-201.

that account intended to say on a pre-*Synopsis* context. However, I will argue that, once this 'source K' is absorbed into the *Synopsis* by Skylitzes, probably around the end of the century its message changes substantially, becoming a vehicle for Komnenian propaganda. To illustrate this, I will now analyse Skylitzes' account of the civil war between Michael VI and Isaak Komnenos, which – as I will argue – proceeds almost completely from the 'source K'.

In the *Synopsis*, the passage on the election of Michael VI Stratiotikos 'the Old' closely follows the previously-examined testimonies of Psellos and Attaleiates: court members chose Michael, a courtier of old age, in order to control him behind the scenes.[214] Michael is therefore introduced in the *Synopsis* as a subversive character, enslaved to his subordinates, an old soldier ruled by eunuchs. A few negative remarks on his decisions as emperor follow: Skylitzes referred to Michael's exceeding generosity as emperor, noted his revival of useless ancient customs, forced the citizens to wear a specific clothing, and appointed inadequate functionaries as tax collectors. Skylitzes summarised this by describing the emperor as 'wielding the sceptre artlessly and governing without skill'.[215]

After this early negative interpretation of Michael's governing skills, the following episode narrates the generals' visit to the court, asking for reasonable rewards from an emperor who had recently received wide acclamation for his generosity and liberality. As the imperial government rejected their demands, the generals rebelled, and eventually deposed Michael. However, this central story, essentially shared between the three historical accounts analysed, is complemented by smaller stories of other rebellions against Michael: the brief uprising of the *proedros* Theodosios, the rebellion of Hervé Frankopoulos in the eastern provinces, and

[214] This time the members of the court who chose Michael are further described: it was Leo Synkellos (surnamed Strabospondylos, recently appointed by the empress Theodora) and the eunuchs from the palace who elected the new ruler: *Synopsis* 480.31-32; Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 447-448 n. 6 referred to Psellos' and Attaleiates' favourable attitude towards Leo, in contrast with Skylitzes' narrative. Their attitude towards Leo is probably conditioned by the authors' social network and the requirements of the narrative: Attaleiates is hostile to Isaak's rebellion, while Psellos supported it in the *Chronographia*, having contacts in both sides of the conflict. Also, E. de Vries-van der Velden, 'Les amitiés dangereuses: Psellos et Leon Paraspondylos', *BSl* 60 (1999) 315-50.
[215] *Synopsis* 483.93-94: καὶ διετέλεσεν οὕτως ἀφελῶς καὶ ἀτέχνως ἰθύνων τὰ σκῆπτρα καὶ κυβερνῶν.

the insurrection of Bryennios, which can be considered a part of Isaak's rebellion, but has a great autonomy in the story.

The story of Theodosios, the cousin of the former emperor Constantine Monomachos, is briefly mentioned at the very beginning of the chapter, when Michael's election has just been mentioned, and as a reaction to this proclamation. The election of Michael is contrasted with Theodosios' rage: he considers himself the legitimate ruler by virtue of lineage, 'demanding the throne as though it were a hereditary property'.[216] If the whole episode has a clear point for the reader it is that this claim is not enough for someone to seize the throne. Theodosios' anger is palpable and unrestrained, acting mindlessly as he walked down the city streets up to the church of Hagia Sophia, where he requested that the patriarch join his side. Theodosios' supporters are described by Skylitzes as slaves, familiars, neighbours, and 'as many as were somewhat hot-headed'.[217] Captives will join him, for Theodosios broke the gates of the prison at the *praetorium*, 'in the hope (I think) of accomplishing some great and noble deed with them',[218] Skylitzes wrote mockingly. The patriarch closed the gates of the church and kept them that way, deaf to Theodosios' claims, until the few supporters of the pretender gradually abandoned him. Theodosios' story ends with a pitiful scene of the man 'devoid of all support, a miserable suppliant sitting before the church with his child'.[219]

The second story of a rebellion against Michael VI Stratiotikos is placed between the emperor's first rejection of the generals' claims, and their second diplomatic attempt to rebel. Bryennios had just promised revenge against the ruler, but waited patiently for a suitable occasion. Isaak and his men are not even considering a violent resolution yet. That is the

[216] *Synopsis* 481.53-55: καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν ἀνακαλούμενος, ὡς κληρονομιαῖον τάχα κτῆμα καὶ τὴν αὐτῷ προσῆκον, ὡς μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων ἐγγύτητα ἔχοντι αἵματος πρὸς τὸν ἀπέλθοντα βασιλέα.
[217] *Synopsis* 481.49: ὅσοι περ ἦσαν τὰς φρένας κουφότεροι.
[218] *Synopsis* 481.57: ἐλπίσας, οἶμαι, δι' αὐτῶν μέγα τι διαπράξασθαι καὶ γενναῖον.
[219] *Synopsis* 482.73-74: καὶ λοιπὸν ἔρημος πάντων καταλειφθεὶς ἱκέτης ἐλεεινὸς μετὰ τοῦ παιδὸς πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καθίζει.

moment when Skylitzes recounted Hervé Frankopoulos' story, which shows the opposite reaction: despite being praised as a general and having remained loyal to the Romans, his aggressive reaction towards the empire once his propositions were also rejected revealed his true condition as an enraged barbarian, unable to swallow his pride.[220] Hervé proceeded rapidly and without the required precaution: he departed from the city and convinced some three hundred Franks to join his cause, a number that we must understand as mockingly insufficient for a full-scale rebellion. An altercation between the Franks and the Turkish troops commanded by Samouch reduced Hervé's troops even more. The survivors regrouped and took refuge in the city of Chelat, north of the Lake Van, and ruled by an emir. Despite Hervé's suspicion of the emir and his warning to his troops to stay outside the city, they ignored these warnings and entered Chelat. The emir, Samouch, and the other Saracens in the city agreed to capture the Franks, slaughtering those who resisted. Hervé was captured and sent to the emperor as a gesture of the emir's friendship.

Following Hervé's story, the account on the generals' second rejection follows. After their proposals are rejected a second time, the officials agree to take measures, and prepare their rebellion. That is the moment when the narrator included the conclusion of Bryennios' story, which is the third smaller account that seems to move away from the wider narrative of the *Synopsis* about the civil war.[221] Unlike Attaleiates' account, which was very critical with the insurgents, Skylitzes dedicates more space to introduce Bryennios as another general rejected by Michael, highlighting the injustice and the humiliation he suffered. Unlike Hervé, Bryennios took his time to plan a proper rebellion. Even Kekaumenos suggested inviting Bryennios to join the rebel cause. Since Kekaumenos' actions are always an indication of good

[220] *Synopsis* 484.41-486.95.
[221] *Synopsis* 487.34-488-488.63; differently from the stories of Theodosios and Hervé, Bryennios' fate is also briefly referred by Attaleiates: *History* 53-54/43.4-14. What suggested me to include this passage together with the other two stories is their common theme: different attempts to rebel against Michael before Isaak's ultimate victory.

judgment in this account, it seems likely that the narrator shaped the account so that the targeted audience would sympathise with Bryennios and his fate.

Nevertheless, Bryennios finally precipitates his rebellion, as his emotions take control of him. When the patrician John Opsaras arrives to Bryennios' lands with gold to pay the soldiers, the general takes the gold and begins to pay the troops more than what was agreed. Opsaras protests at Bryennios' generosity. Bryennios advised him 'to stay calm and do as he was told in silence but Opsaras contradicted him insolently, which greatly angered Bryennios'.[222] After being humiliated by the emperor and his eunuch court, denied fair gold for his men, and confronted at his own house, Bryennios rises from his seat, punches Opsaras, grabs him by the hair and the beard, and throws him to the ground. Bryennios chains Opsaras and generously shares his gold with the troops, until the patrician Lykanthes marches against him, recognising Bryennios' actions as rebellious. As in Attaleiates' account, after defeating Bryennios, Lykanthes liberates Opsaras, who mercilessly blinds his former captor, and sends him to the emperor. Skylitzes concludes: 'such were the rewards Bryennios reaped for his rashness and wilfulness, to say nothing of his mindlessness'.[223] The narrator condemns the unreasonable violent outburst of Bryennios but, unlike Attaleiates, this narration also invites the reader to consider the whole episode as a product of Michael's misguided government. As in Attaleiates' *History,* events force the rebels to action.

The three stories of Theodosios, Hervé, and Bryennios are not mentioned by Psellos, while Attaleiates includes Bryennios' episode only briefly in his account. For Skylitzes, they apparently constitute supplementary anecdotes to the main narrative on Michael's tyrannical reign and the general's rebellion. Are these anecdotes related to the main story? It is possible

[222] *Synopsis* 488.43-44: τοῦ δὲ Βρυεννίου ἀτρέμας ἔχειν εἰπόντος καὶ ποιεῖν σιωπῇ τὸ κεκελευσμένον παρεγγυήσαντος.
[223] *Synopsis* 488.61-63: καὶ ὁ μὲν Βρυέννιος τοιαύτας ἀπέδωκε δίκας τῆς ἑαυτοῦ προπετείας καὶ αὐθαδείας, ἵνα μὴ λέγωμεν ἀνοίας.

that Skylitzes worked with different sources on Isaak's rebellion, or that he added these episodes to the main account only as unrelated additions that enrich the reader's knowledge of Michael's reign. If so, Skylitzes lacks a solid narrative in this episode. But is the extended detail on a secondary story really symptomatic of the narrator's lack of focus on a central narrative, namely the rise and fall of emperors?

There are good reasons to think that this may not be the case. Following Shepard, Skylitzes' account of the rebellion mostly derives from Kekaumenos' text.[224] But I would argue that the accounts of Hervé, Theodoros, and Bryennios are thematically linked to the main narrative on Isaak's rebellion. The episodes work as negative models of rebellions against Michael, underlining where these usurpers failed and throwing Isaak's and Kekaumenos' success in sharp relief.[225] From a character focus point of view, these stories are used to promote the narrator's view on the main rebellion: Kekaumenos and Isaak are presented as victorious where others failed. In fact, it is only through exposing formerly-failed insurrections that Isaak's victory is not depicted as an easy affair, or inexorable. This allows the narrator to increase the merit of the successful rebels while still presenting the emperor Michael as a tyrant incapable of ruling virtuously.

Skylitzes' account of Isaak's rebellion is characterised by the praise of the winning side's stratagems, as opposed to the poor politics on Michael's side. That is the main contrast with the *Chronographia,* which seeks to underline Isaak's suitability for the throne in terms of the favourable depiction of Isaak's character – moderate, humble, inspirer of cosmic harmony, and desired by all as ruler – while Skylitzes stresses certain strategical decisions taken by the rebellious generals. Psellos' approach allowed him to reproach Isaak for his participation in a

[224] Shepard 'Memoirs as Manifesto' discusses this matter in detail, as referred on pages 64-72 above, among others.
[225] Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', 197 reflects on the role of the paralleled rebellions for Kekaumenos' narrative.

rebellion, while presenting him as the ideal ruler, nevertheless – a convenient stance since Psellos ended up embracing Isaak as emperor. The approach from the 'source K', however, does not delegitimise the rebellion at all, but frames it as a legitimate reaction towards tyrannical rule, as will be analysed in further sections. [226]

Skylitzes' account is focused on the generals' insurrection against the emperor Michael. Nevertheless, even though Isaak is elected as candidate to the throne, the leading figure from a narrative point of view is Kekaumenos. The rebellious generals are even portrayed electing Kekaumenos as their leader 'since he was superior to the others in age, bravery and experience … but he was anxious to escape this burden and with a single word he put an end to their confabulation'.[227] The episode reads as both a demonstration of Kekaumenos' lack of personal ambition and strong character, and as a demonstration of everybody's recognition of his worth. During the rebellion, Kekaumenos acts and the others follow him. In the decisive battle against the loyalist forces, Kekaumenos leads the successful flank in the battle,[228] and is later informed of the plot inside the capital, organising the generals' strategy then.[229] Finally, Kekaumenos is represented in the *Synopsis* as the first official to take the imperial palace, preparing the ground for Isaak's arrival.[230]

A further proof of Kekaumenos' central role is his relation with the minor episodes of Theodoros, Hervé, and Bryennios. The accounts of failed rebellions served as negative examples, but not in contrast to the actions of Isaak, nor the moves of his band of brothers as a

[226] See pages 189-208 below for a further discussion of Isaak's accession to the throne, as represented by Psellos and Skylitzes.
[227] *Synopsis* 487.26-29: και πᾶσιν ἁπλῶς ἐφαίνετο τοῖς συνωμόταις, ὡς καὶ γήρᾳ καὶ ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ ἐμπειρία τῶν ἄλλων προὔχων ὁ Κεκαυμένος ἄξιος εἰς τοῦτο. ὁ δὲ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ τὸ βάρος ἀποσείσασθαι σπεύδων συντόνῳ λόγῳ διέλυσε τὰς πολυλογίας.
[228] *Synopsis* 495.44-52.
[229] *Synopsis* 497.11-13; Éric Limousin argues that Skylitzes' praise to Psellos in this passage is related to his personal gratitude to the author, although it could be explained as a way to legitimise Kekaumenos' actions, which are advised by capable and trustworthy men such as Psellos: E. Limousin, 'L'entrée dans la carrière à Byzance au XI[e] siècle: Michel Psellos et Jean Skylitzès', in J-C. Cassard, Y. Coativy, A. Gallice and D. Le Page (eds.), *Le prince, l'argent, les hommes au Moyen Âge* (Rennes 2008) 67-76.
[230] *Synopsis* 500.86-87.

whole: they are portrayed in contrast to Kekaumenos' actions. Theodoros' uprising, based in his lineage only, is established in opposition to Kekaumenos' depiction. Even though Skylitzes regards a prestigious lineage as a positive trait, Kekaumenos is praised by Michael 'because he had attained the rank he now held not by birth nor by any favour but by his own exceptional merits'.[231] Kekaumenos is also elected by his peers as emperor by distinctions other than a prestigious lineage.

Where Frankopoulos and Bryennios failed because of their lack of patience, Kekaumenos waited and prevailed, leading his rebellion to success and putting Michael's tyrannical reign to an end. Instead of thoughtlessly proclaiming the rebellion as Bryennios was captured, Kekaumenos took longer to join the rebellion in order to slowly convince the members of a province unfamiliar to him to join his cause, which is presented as an extraordinary feat. Kekaumenos' delay in his arrival brought anxiety to his companions: what if he had betrayed them and joined the emperor's side? Some early news pointed in that direction: 'This news threw the supporters of Komnenos into severe disarray and confusion at the thought of having such an enemy at their backs'.[232] Only after Kekaumenos arrived, the army marched to war, 'accompanied by hymns and cheering'.[233] This episode stands in sharp contrast to Frankopoulos' disastrous campaign, and Bryennios' premature actions. Kekaumenos is portrayed as reasonable and patient, unlike the previous rebels. This passage highlights the general's virtues and the anxiety of his peers to have him on their side. Furthermore, the episode was perhaps conceived originally by the Kekaumenos-narrator as a very convenient explanation of his delay in supporting the rebel cause, transforming potential criticism into praise for his restrained attitude.

[231] *Synopsis* 483.15-17: καὶ μᾶλλον τὸν Κεκαυμένον, ὡς μὴ ἐκ πατέρων, μηδ' ἐκ προσπαθείας τινός, ἀλλ' ἐξ οἰκείων ἀνδραγαθημάτων πρὸς ἣν ἐκέκτητο τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἀναχθέντα καθέδραν.
[232] *Synopsis* 489.86-87: αὕτη δὲ ἡ ἀγγελία οὐκ εἰς μικρὰν ἀγωνίαν καὶ ταραχὴν ἐνέβαλε τοὺς περὶ τὸν Κομνηνόν, εἰ μέλλοιεν ἕξειν τοιοῦτον ἐχθρὸν κατὰ νώτων.
[233] *Synopsis* 492. 56: ὑμνούμενός τε καὶ εὐφημούμενος.

Skylitzes' account adds further complications to the study of character focus and its narrative repercussions in the study of Byzantine political ideology. The side stories of Theodoros, Frankopoulos and Bryennios fit in the narrative not with the sole aim of collecting diverse sources, but to support the main narrative that legitimises the general's uprising as both reasonable and glorious. But it is not Kekaumenos who ended up on the throne – what is the role of the emperor Isaak in all that? In Shepard's opinion, the 'source K' evokes a resentful memory of an emperor who, most likely, ousted Kekaumenos out of his inner circle as soon as he reached the throne. Thus the story relegates Isaak to a secondary position: he hesitates and walks behind Kekaumenos, the true hero of the account – how could this constitute a positive memory of the first Komnenian emperor?[234]

It all depends on the context in which the account is read, and its comparison with other stories about Isaak. Despite being depicted as a relatively passive, secondary figure, Isaak is portrayed in the *Synopsis* as the leader of a just rebellion that conquered the throne from the hands of a tyrant. While Shepard emphasises the secondary position of Isaak in the narrative, Skylitzes' account constitutes, from among the surviving historical accounts of the period, the most enthusiastic depiction of the rebellion.

Unfortunately, there is little more that can be known of the sources available to Skylitzes, or the extent in which the narrator edited Kekaumenos' account – for all we know, Skylitzes could have completed the main narrative with details or even substantial chunks of information from now-lost sources.[235] However, this hopeless situation ameliorates as we turn to the *Continuation*. This account, likely composed by Skylitzes himself, heavily relies on the

[234] Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto', 199-201.
[235] R.J. Lilie, 'Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography', *DOP* 68 (2014) 157-210; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*, 155 linked Skylitzes' negative portrayal of Constantine VIII with an image propagated by the Komnenian family towards the end of the eleventh century, since Constantine mistreated one of his ancestors; in the lines of what has been debated above on the 'source K', Skylitzes' aim to produce a narrative negative towards Constantine might have justified his selection of sources for that reign as well.

historical works of Attaleiates and – to a lesser extent – Psellos, to whom we have complete access nowadays. In the chapter dedicated to the narrative tempo, we will return to Isaak, now crowned emperor, comparing his depiction in the *Continuation* with his depiction in the *History* of Attaleiates. The hypothesis proposed here, namely that Skylitzes used his sources to turn them into a subtle propaganda favouring the Komnenoi, receives sufficient validation once we study the *Continuation*'s deviations from the *History* and the *Chronographia*. Once again, despite the strong winds of history imposed by previous narratives, Skylitzes manages to sail towards the applause of his own regime.[236]

[236] See pages 287-297 below.

4. Characterisation

In the previous chapter, I discussed how narrators depict specific characters – mostly emperors, soon-to-be emperors, and occasionally the narrators themselves – as the main actors of the different accounts; narratives focus on what they do and how they do it. These actions are represented in the narratives as significant for the political life in Byzantium.

In this chapter, I will further analyse how narrators structure the connection between the protagonists and the political life of the empire. Two basic questions will be addressed. Firstly, how do narrators qualify characters and their actions in the accounts? This will entail introducing some ideas on ethical principles in Byzantium and their representation in the literary genres from our narrations. Then I will discuss how the narrator connects the characters' actions and morality to political change in the empire. Further discussion on the relations between the individual ruler and the collective body politic will follow in chapters five and six, by analysing the role of spatial context and the narrative tempo in forming the discourse in the narratives.

4.1. Being a good boy: Byzantine characterisation, from genre to gender

4.1.1. Ethics, intertextuality, and genre

> You, O most divine emperor, were considered the most desirable and worthy man for the highest office, I mean the imperial one, because even before you came to the throne you had obtained a comprehensive training in military arms, battles, stratagems of every type, and brave deeds, and also because you were compassionate to everyone, gentle, and above all vanity.[1]

[1] Michael Attaleiates, *History* 3/3.5-9: Σὺ μέν, ὦ θειότατε βασιλεῦ, πᾶσαν παιδείαν ἔν τε στρατιωτικοῖς ὅπλοις καὶ μάχαις καὶ στρατηγίαις παντοδαπαῖς καὶ ἀνδραγαθίαις καὶ πρὸ τῆς βασιλείας ἐξησκηκὼς καὶ φιλάνθρωπος πᾶσι καὶ γαληνὸς καὶ παντὸς τύφου γενόμενος ὑψηλότερος, ποθεινότατος ἐλογίζου καὶ τῆς πρώτης καὶ βασιλικῆς ἀξίας ἐπάξιος.

With these words, Attaleiates begins his dedication of the *History* to the emperor Botaneiates. Attaleiates thus introduces his account by pouring over Botaneiates – his patron and ultimate hero of the story – a number of praising qualifiers, describing what kind of a person, and a ruler, Botaneiates is. He is described as θειότατε (most divine), trained in military affairs and brave deeds, and also φιλάνθρωπος (compassionate) and γαληνός (gentle), among other epithets. It is because Botaneiates possesses these traits, Attaleiates indicates, that he ends up ascending the throne 'by the will of God and the unanimous pleading and consent' of anyone who knew him.[2]

Every translation involves an interpretative exercise from the original text, by nature imperfect.[3] Byzantine values are also original and essentially different from our own.[4] They are products of their own time and circumstances.[5] Translating φιλάνθρωπος as 'philanthropic', a developed form of both the signifier and the signified, removes many Byzantine connotations from the term, related to piety and nobility. We might in fact confuse their use of the term with our memory of the people we refer to in the modern world as 'philanthropists'.

Even further, θειότατε, meaning 'divine' in its superlative form, should not be translated as 'the most divine'.[6] From a modern Greek perspective, θειότατε redirects to the 'absolute superlative', its translation being closer to 'very divine' or 'exceedingly divine' instead of 'the

[2] *History* 3/3.10-11.
[3] L. Hardwick, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London 2000), esp. 9-22; J. Robson, 'Lost in Translation? The Problem of Aristophanic Humour', in L. Hardwick and C. Stray (eds.), *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (Chichester 2011) 174-176.
[4] K. Haynes, 'Text, Theory, and Reception', in C. Martindale and R.F. Thomas (eds.), *Classics and the Use of Reception* (Oxford 2006), 44-55.
[5] In the case of the Byzantine *basilikos logos*, Menander had a decisive influence in shaping the values to be praised and the way they develop on the text: *Menander Rhetor, The Imperial Oration* esp. 76-95.
[6] That use of the superlative was already 'on its way out' during the Hellenistic era: D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MC 1996) 301; D. Holton, G. Horrocks, M. Janssen, T. Lendari, I. Manolessou, and N. Toufexis, *The Cambridge Grammar of Medieval and Early Modern Greek*, vol. 2 (Cambridge 2019) 814-819 argue that this phenomenon was complete by the Late Medieval Greek period, whose beginning is marked by the year 1100, as specified in D. Holton, G. Horrocks, M. Janssen, T. Lendari, I. Manolessou, and N. Toufexis, *The Cambridge Grammar of Medieval and Early Modern Greek*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 2019) xix.

most divine'.[7] Attaleiates' understanding of the word may have moved between the two poles, profiting from the grammatical ambiguity of the superlative. However, a reader only familiarised with Ancient Greek grammar could easily be shocked by the apparently excessive tone of the superlative, as if Attaleiates considered that there was no man more divine than Botaneiates. The field of Byzantine studies conveys a plethora of attempts to understand what the Byzantines are saying and why: Krallis, for instance, declared himself clueless as to why Attaleiates wrote the dedication to a man such as Botaneiates –he was certainly not the holiest man in the empire, nor even at court![8] Other scholars would approach the text differently: Nilsson's adaptation of Genette's concept of 'palimpsestuous transtextuality', invites us to approach 'o most divine ruler', a line repeated in multiple *enkomia* and literary works, as a recognition of a shared antique culture between the narrator and the intended audience. Following this approach derived from Genette's concept, the point conveyed in the first line of the *History* does not only concern the emperor, but also implies how divine (here meaning transcendental) the cosmic *taxis* and the *logos* were.[9] Step by step, and through generations of critical analyses, dictionaries, manuals and more localised studies may help us to reconstruct the historical processes that led to the production of specific terms and narratives about the world, ethics and politics in Byzantium.[10]

[7] D. Holton, P. Mackridge, and I. Philippaki-Warbuton, *Greek: An Essential Grammar of the Modern Language* (London 2004) 64-65.

[8] Dimitris Krallis also emphasised throughout his book the existence of better candidates to the throne than Botaneiates: thus, the dedication could only be read as a lip service, or even an implicit satire: D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012) esp. xxxiv.

[9] I. Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance: la literature au XII^e siècle* (Paris 2014) 45 defines the concept as 'un modèle sous-jacent de tradition littéraire qui transparaît à travers le texte quant à sa forme, aux motifs et à la langue, accordant à l'oeuvre littéraire un sens référentiel et une signification culturelle'; she chose the concept of 'palimpsestuous transtextuality' over 'intertextuality' because, she argues, 'l'imitation littéraire à Byzance est beaucoup plus riche que le terme d'intertextualité'; in reference to G. Genette, *Introduction à l'architexte* (Paris 1970) esp. 85-90 and *Palimpsestes: la literature au second degré* (Paris 1982); also in C. Messis and I. Nilsson, 'Byzantine Storytelling and Modern Narratology: An Introduction', in C. Messis, M. Mullett, and I. Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018) 4; Nilsson's emphasis is in rejecting a merely aesthetic function of the transtextual relations: see Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 29.

[10] G.K. Giannakis, 'Can a Historical Greek Grammar be Written? – an appraisal of A.N. Jannaris work', in C.C. Caragounis (ed.) *Greek: A Language in Evolution: Essays in Honour of Antonios N. Jannaris* (Hildesheim, Zurich, and New York, NY 2010) 295-314.

Characterising an individual and their actions, both in Byzantium and in any other society, constitutes a symbolic process.[11] Processes of symbolisation are linked to objective conditions surrounding the narrator: more notably, those individuals and groups holding advantageous positions will have the upper hand in imposing their views by force or by persuasion.[12] The notion of 'palimpsestuous transtextuality' also reminds researchers of the immense weight of tradition in the Byzantine process of creating new narratives and discourses.[13] Thus, a discourse on ethics would be convincing to the Byzantines not only because of the authority of the orator, but also because the author engaged with a shared intertextual web of past references to the same topic. Connecting with past sayings and events becomes both a decisive element for saying something new and a goal in itself.[14]

As referred to in the introductory chapter, Byzantine ethics have been often labelled as the imposition of a dogma by the powerful Church, in alliance with the imperial institutions, over a vastly disempowered population.[15] In practice, Byzantine debates on ethics, though effectively influenced by those sitting in a powerful position, allowed for a coexistence of

[11] D. Smythe, 'Women as Outsiders', in L. James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London and New York, NY 1997) 154:

> Literature is the product and mirror of experience. Words are symbolic information conveyors whose form is arbitrary, and whose meaning is determined by those who use them. The use of symbols by persons in social interaction enables them to give meaning to transactions and to understand – at a socially defined level – what is going on, to create the symbolic environment in which they live. (…) ways of thinking are influenced by the ways in which those thoughts can be communicated.

[12] J. Haldon, 'Social Élites, Wealth, and Power' in J. Haldon (ed.) *The Social History of Byzantium* (Malden, MA and Oxford 2009), esp. 169-170.

[13] A. Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques à l'époque macédonienne', *Parekbolai. An Electronic Journal for Byzantine Literature* 5 (2015) 67, convincingly argues that different Byzantine authors who reproduced or responded to certain discourses about a given event or character were not necessarily relating to a now-lost written source, since discourses could be sustained orally.

[14] For instance, Leonora Neville's analysis of the historical accounts by Nikephoros Bryennios and his wife Anna Komnene analyses the latter's emphasis on archaic Greek references to construct her models of masculinity. Neville convincingly argues that Anna's focus on that aspect of the Byzantine heritage had not to do with a shift from a 'Roman' identity to a more 'Hellenic' one – Anna simply collected the values that were more convenient to her story, in response to the morality portrayed in her husband's work: L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. The* Material for History *of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge, 2012) 182-193: Bryennios, according to Neville, based his story on praising characters who choose to stand by their ideals instead of winning at any cost, while Anna argued the opposite.

[15] See pages 6-14 above.

multiple, acceptable responses that were not perceived as being in open conflict with the dogma.[16]

Byzantine historians did have different stances on ethics, but also tried to build their particular viewpoints upon a foundation of numerous conventions that were familiar to their intended audience – only by careful use of these conventions could our authors expect to be understood and their ideas accepted. Literary genres constitute a particular type of such conventions. Attaleiates' words shown above were placed in narratives following specific genre rules that, though flexible and permanently evolving, gave indications to both author and audience about what was to be expected from the narrative.[17] Genres help to frame the situations and to reduce otherwise never-ending debates into stylised, synthesised formats.

Attention to generic conventions within Byzantine literature has been a matter of debate in recent decades. Scholars such as Margaret Mullett or Ruth Macrides convincingly argued that, though genres did not constitute fixed categories in Byzantium or in ancient Greece and Rome, they nevertheless posed as useful frames for constructing new narratives.[18] Studies on

[16] On the epistemological side of the matter, (how do we know what is good?), Brubaker highlighted how Patriarch Photios shared certain scepticism to the power of sacred texts to reach deeper truths, at least when compared with the revelatory capacities of sacred images: Photios, 17.5, p.170; further discussed in L. Brubaker, 'Introduction: The Sacred Image', in R. Ousterhout and L. Brubaker (eds.) *The Sacred Image, East and West* (Urbana, IL 1995) 15; and in L. Brubaker, 'Byzantine Art in the Ninth Century: Theory, Practice, and Culture', *BMGS* 13 (1989) 70-75; Gregory of Nyssa also professed scepticism to the possibility to reach substantial knowledge through the *logos*: J. Hernández Lobato, 'Más allá del pensamiento. El escepticismo epistemológico de Gregorio de Nisa', in A. I. Bouton-Touboulic and C. Lévy (eds.), *Scepticisme et religion. Constantes et évolutions, de la philosophie hellénistique à la philosophie médiévale* (Turnhout 2016) 157-169; beyond epistemological debates, hagiography offers plenty of examples that, at least in appearance, offer different ethical models, regarding issues such as monasticism, *philantrophia*, and politics: P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, NJ 2012).

[17] M. Mullett, 'The Madness of Genre', *DOP* 46 (1992) 234-235. As Annalinden Weller argued, authors 'engaged in narrative world making' through 'an assembly of referents commonly shared between author an audience, a world which is bound by collectively agreed-upon rules of causality and verisimilitude and populated by recognisable character types: A. Weller, 'Ideological Storyworlds in Byzantium and Armenia: Historiography and Model Selves in Narratives of Insurrection', in C. Messis, M. Mullett, and I. Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018) 71-90, esp. 71; M. Depew and D. Obbink (eds.) *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* (Cambridge, MA 2000) also argue that, even in Antiquity, literary genres were loosely defined.

[18] Mullett, 'Madness of Genre', 235-243, also 'Dancing with Deconstructionists in the Gardens of the Muses', *BMGS* 14 (1990) 258-275; R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C.N. Constantinides, N.M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys, and A.D. Angelou (eds.), *Philellen: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996), 205-224; W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke and New York, NY 2013) 468-

genre have recently attracted the attention of narrative scholars, particularly from the point of view of their development through time.[19]

The genre's function as a 'communication system' and its capacity to convey different messages becomes fundamental for the analysis of our historical narratives and how their protagonists are depicted..[20] For instance, Catherine Holmes offered an explanation for the apparently erratic content of some sections within Skylitzes' *Synopsis* by examining them, not from the perspective of modern approaches to history, but from the conventions of Byzantine *diegemata* ('tales'). Such an approach reveals key information concerning Skylitzes' methodological toolkit and how he expected his account to be interpreted (namely as a collection of didactic examples).[21] In another example, Psellos' account of the emperor Michael IV ends with the dying emperor's entry into a monastery, a section that contains some tropes of the hagiographical genre, equating his body to a sacrificial victim and arming himself with the holy mantle of Christ, the helmet of Salvation, and the cross.[22] It is within the hagiographical rules that the reader contextualises details such as the emperor's choice to walk barefoot when the only footwear available were the imperial purple shoes, despite his illness: it is *because* of the hagiographical setting that the action is regarded as praiseworthy instead of foolish by the audience.[23] Psellos also mentioned the lack of magnificence in Michael's burial,

478 emphasised the difference between Byzantine historical accounts and other genres; criticised by J. Signes Codoñer, 'Dates or Narrative? Looking for Structures in Middle Byzantine Historiography (9th to 11th Century)', in E. Juhász (ed.) *Byzanz und das Abendland IV. Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia* (Budapest 2016) esp. 228-229; a recent attempt to classify different types of middle and late Byzantine historical writing, in connection with other historical contexts, can be found in P. Magdalino, 'Byzantine Historical Writing 900-1400', in S. Foot and C.F. Robinson (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 2 (Oxford 2012) 218-237.

[19] M. Fludernik, 'The Diachronization of Narratology', *Narratology* 11.3 (2003) esp. 331-332.

[20] Mullett, 'Madness of Genre', 234, defined 'genre' as a 'communication system for the use of writers in writing, readers in reading and interpreting' information from a narrative; see also A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford 1982) 20-23 and 256.

[21] C. Holmes, 'The Rhetorical Structures of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 187-200, esp. 196-199.

[22] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 4.52-55; also earlier in the depiction of the emperor's strong will against disease: *Chronographia* 4.42-44 and 50.

[23] *Chronographia* 4.54.1-12.

which can be read as a further proof of his humility and ultimate detachment from power, both elements praised along the lines of hagiographical genre.[24] Although Psellos also mentions the small scale of the burial of Romanos III, Michael's predecessor, his point is to further criticise this emperor's excessive expenditures on the temple: despite all his efforts on behalf of the church, he only enjoyed that small space in the building.[25] Two tombs are described as small, or humble, by the same narrator in the same account: one as criticism to the high aspirations of the deceased, and the other as a proof of the individual's praiseworthy humility. The genre rules help the reader to decode the message.

Our narratives are, for the most part, designed by following the rules of genres such as history, *enkomion*, biography, or hagiography, together with other epic and dramatic digressions.[26] By following these genres, the narratives tend to condense their points on past events and, because of the genre rules as well, to present them within mainstream moralistic and aesthetic conventions.[27] Our narrators claimed to know the causes of historical development, which were grounded in a number of values that, for the most part, remained unquestioned. Therefore, the narratives studied tend not to analyse existing codes of behaviour beyond what is considered customary for the genre. Instead, narratives tend to explain the

[24] *Chronographia* 4.55.4-6.
[25] *Chronographia* 4.5.
[26] C. Amande, 'L' encomio di Niceforo Botaniate nell' *Historia* di Attaliate: modelli, fonti, suggestion letterarie', *Serta historica antiqua* 2 (1989) 265-286; J. Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía en la historia: algunas consideraciones sobre géneros literarios en la Cronografía de Miguel Pselo', in V. Varcárcel Martínez *Las biografías latina y griega como género literario. De la Antigüedad al Renacimiento: algunas calas* (Bilbao 2010) 175-206; J. Signes Codoñer, 'Dates or Narrative?', esp. 239, noted that the title of Psellos' historical work itself is indicative of the combination of chronography, history, and biography; on the presence of dramatic digressions in combination with history in the cases of Attaleiates' *History* and Psellos' *Chronographia*, among other works, see V. Katsaros, 'Το δραματικό στοιχείο στα ιστοριογραφικά έργα του 11ου και 12ου αιώνα', in P. Odorico, A. Agapitos and M. Hinterberger (eds.), *L'écriture de la mémoire. La littérarité de l'historiographie. Actes du IIIe colloque international philologique "EPMHNEIA", Nicosie, 6-7-8 mai 2004* (Paris 2006) 281-316, esp. 293-294 and 302.
[27] I. Ljubarskij, 'Quellenforschung and/or Literary Criticism: Narrative Structures in Byzantine Historical Writings', *SO* 73 (1998) 5-73, here 16-21 was one of the pioneers in explaining Byzantine historical accounts as internally divided in smaller episodes, which converged around a given argument; V. Katsaros, 'Το δραματικό στοιχείο', 315-316 explains the insertion of other genres into middle Byzantine historical accounts as a combination of literary goals and the argument each author wished to convey in their narration.

historical events 'accurately', based on these widespread ethical notions shared by both narrator and audience.[28] As Attaleiates phrased it:

> History … reveals the lives of those who were virtuous and those who were not, describes illustrious deeds born of flawless planning and effort as well as inglorious actions caused by the faulty planning or negligence of those governing public affairs.[29]

Consequently, in their task of reconstructing history, narrators reassure the audience that they themselves are moral characters, able to judge what is right and what is not, and consistently attempting to convince the audience of their version of events.[30] The ability of genre rules to convey a message to the audience brings additional information for the analytical reader to understand, for example, the pervasiveness of specific moral tropes in genres such as history, hagiography, or *enkomia*.

Nevertheless, genre rules do not impose a tight frame for the narratives. Narrators combine generic rules and, on occasions, subvert the audience's expectations. A significant but unusual example can be found in Psellos' analysis of the nature of the genres of history and *enkomion*. Wishing to legitimise his criticism of Constantine Monomachos' reign, Psellos allows himself to step out of the historical account and introduce a philosophical digression, wherein he justifies his earlier panegyrics to Constantine, while legitimising his later version of Constantine's reign, now under the more critical spectrum of history.[31] In the *Chronographia*, Psellos also recognises at times that he is leaving the natural pace of an historical account, inserting further details more related to other literary genres, but finds the

[28] *Chronographia* 6.22-25; *History* 5/4.18-22; John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 3.6-4.59.
[29] *History* 7/6.5-10: Τὸ τῆς ἱστορίας χρῆμα … τοὺς τῶν ἀρίστων καὶ μὴ τοιούτων βίους ἀνακαλύπτον καὶ πράξεις ἐπιφανεῖς ἐξ ἀνεπιλήπτου βουλῆς καὶ σπουδῆς διαγράφον καὶ ἀδοξίας αὖ πάλιν ἐκ δυσβουλίας ἢ ὀλιγωρίας τῶν προεστώτων τοῖς πράγμασιν…
[30] See pages 72-81 above for a further discussion on the audience.
[31] *Chronographia* 6.21-28; I developed my approach towards Psellos' discussion on literary genres, and modern interpretations of his words, in F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano: Una revisión a la aproximación bipartita de la *Cronografía* de Miguel Pselo y la *Historia* de Miguel Ataliates', *Estudios Bizantinos* 7 (2019) [Forthcoming]; Psellos' explicit digressions on the nature of history and *enkomion* allowed him to prevent, or reply, to criticism on his text, either on its own or compared to Psellos' earlier discourses and actions.

means to present his narrative as a historical account nonetheless.[32] Attaleiates, though less innovative in this aspect, also combines history and *enkomion*, and other genres for the sake of his narrative.[33]

The choice of literary genres therefore conditions how codes of behaviour are approached in the accounts. Let us consider, for example, the different treatment offered to the rebellion against Michael V Kalaphates in different sources. Depending on the genre, one narrator talks about the unpredictability of the future, while another focuses on the predictability of the disaster. In his *Strategikon*, Kekaumenos referred to Michael's deposition and blinding, both as an example of the unpredictability of (political) life and the necessity for anyone holding some power to expect the worst.[34] His message is conveyed in a book of advice, and the advice is to beware of the random nature of events. At the opposite extreme, the accounts of Attaleiates and Skylitzes, written decades after the episode and strictly following the rules of the historical genre, bring two different, but equally clear, explanations for Michael's downfall. For Attaleiates, who often presents historical events as the product of 'most evident causes' detectable by wise men,[35] Michael's exile of the empress Zoe meant breaking the golden rule, repeatedly defended in the *History*, of respecting one's benefactors: divine punishment consequently followed.[36] Attaleiates extracts what seemed significant from the chaotic chain of events, and brought it forward in order to craft a moralising story in line with his wider narrative concerning more recent times and characters.

[32] Psellos himself boasted in his *Chronographia* on his capacity to swift from one topic to other, and from the high-learned register of language to a 'simpler' way of speaking: *Chronographia* 6.197 and 7.26; Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y encomio', esp. 177, discussed the combination of different literary genres in the *Chronographia*.
[33] See Amande, 'L'encomio di Niceforo Botaniate', 265-286
[34] Kekaumenos, *Strategikon* 100.13-18.
[35] *History* 194/150.1-2: *αἰτιῶν προφανεστάτων.*
[36] *History* 17/14.13-15, the relation between Isaak and the patriarch Keroularios shall be ranked among these, esp. 62/49.30-50.10, Romanos' regency over Michael VII 176/136.16-17.

For the narrator of the *Synopsis*, it was all a plot organised by lesser men which brought Michael's reign to an end. There was a confusion in the emperor's environment about what to do with Zoe, and the wrong ideas prevailed. Psellos, by combining history and a first-hand description of Michael's downfall, is situated somewhat in between Kekaumenos and the historical accounts. Psellos reiterated Kekaumenos' idea about the unpredictability of political events when he describes the poor state of the former emperor Michael, now dressing as a humble monk and about to be blinded. Psellos represents himself as dramatically clueless: 'I began to curse this life of ours, in which these strange and terrible things so often come to pass, and as if some spring had welled up within me, a flood of tears beyond control poured from my eyes'.[37]

The dramatic approach may have helped Psellos' narration to become more engaging and evocative. However, Psellos has also been offering ideas about the increasing vileness and thoughtlessness of Michael's regime: after getting rid of his uncle and good advisor, the Orphanotrophos, the reader would only expect the whole regime to collapse, as it certainly did. Psellos wondered about ethical issues as well, like other historians. He has approached the affair of Michael's downfall using a combination of genres and perspectives, bringing, at once, an explanation of historical causation and a dramatic reminder of the cluelessness of humans to understand the cosmic order. The commonplaces and values of each genre are thus not restrictive, but fundamental for conveying various messages.

4.1.2. Gender

Byzantine rules of morality are related to socially-constructed stereotypes of age, status and gender.[38] In regards to Byzantine gender stereotypes, Brubaker pointed at the classical and

[37] *Chronographia* 5.40.11-14: ἐπηρασάμην τῆς ἡμετέρας ζωῆς, δι' ἣν εἴωθε συμβαίνειν τὰ καινὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἄτοπα· εἶτα δὴ ὥσπερ τινὸς ἔνδοθεν ἀναρρυείσης πηγῆς, δακρύων ῥοῦς ἀκατάσχετος προεχεῖτο τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν.
[38] A review of earlier approaches to Byzantine studies, first on women and then on gender: L. James, 'Introduction: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Byzantine Studies', in L. James (ed.) *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in*

Christian origin of many of the masculine and female virtues. Male virtues include 'courage, justice, temperance and wisdom … self-control and pursuit of the common good' plus the Christian additions of 'chastity outside marriage, Christian piety and philanthropy'.[39] Female virtues share similar origins to the masculine ones, inheriting ideals from the Roman *matrona* ('gentle, modest, and dedicated to family and home') and, for the case of members of the imperial family, piousness, *philanthropia*, humility and chastity.[40] These stereotypes constitute different perceived consensus on the moral rules ordering the world, and interact with genre conventions as autonomous groups of norms. For instance, although an ideal emperor, as reflected in Menander's rules for *enkomia*, should also be the protector of his family, Psellos justified Isaak's transmission of the crown to his colleague Constantine Doukas by using a narrative trope that is more common in hagiographies.[41] He depicted Isaak as an overall good emperor and head of his family, but he joined a monastery due to the urgings of his piety and illness, revealing a tension between the quest for individual salvation and familial obligations that we can often see in *vitae* over the course of the empire. By using that hagiographic motif, Psellos may have avoided a harsher depiction of Isaak as a failed head of his family, and thus a flawed man and emperor.

Byzantium (London 1997) xi-xxi; see also E. Nardi, 'Bella come luna, fulgida come il sole: un appunto sulla donna nei testi bizantini dell'XI e XII secolo', *MEG* 0 (2000) 135-141.

[39] L. Brubaker, 'Sex, Lies and Textuality: The *Secret History* of Prokopios and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium', in L. Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith (eds.) *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge 2004) 86-87; M. Harlow, 'In the Name of the Father: Procreation, Paternity and Patriarchy', and G. Clark 'The Old Adam: The Fathers and the Unmaking of Masculinity' in L. Foxhall and J.Salmon (eds.), *Thinking Men: Masculinity and its Self-Representation in the Classical Tradition* (London 1998), 155-169 and 170-182.

[40] Brubaker, 'Sex, Lies and Textuality', 87; S. Fichler, 'Social Stereotypes and Historical Analysis: The Case of Imperial Women in Rome', in L. Archer, S. Fischler, and M. Wyke (eds.), *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* (Houndmills 1994) 115-133; S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London 1988), esp. 1-12 and 71-103.

[41] Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration* 74-83; the tension between familial obligations and the individual's pursuit of holiness have been discussed by scholars in past decades, as in E. Patlagean, 'L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance', *Studi Medievali* 17.2 (1976) 597-623.

Byzantine society was a patriarchal one, where women were commonly marginalised.[42] Among other elements of this marginalisation, textual production was mostly assumed to be a male activity. Texts were mostly written by men, voiced a culture that saw the male viewpoint as normative, and the survival of these texts depended on subsequent male approval.[43] Leonora Neville invited scholars to rethink some oddities from Anna Komnene's *History*, one of the very few pre-modern Greek historical accounts written by a female author, as a result of 'Anna's vigorous efforts to look like a good woman while participating in a male activity'.[44] George Tornikes presented Anna's first steps in education as complicated: her parents doubted if non-religious literature would be adequate reading material for a woman.[45] As Smythe pointed out, the fact that historical sources were written by men 'means that we see women as their definers, men, saw them, not as they saw themselves'.[46] However, reading the few Byzantine texts definitely written by women and preserved today does not lead to the appearance of a distinct, 'truer' feminine voice. As Kaldellis noted:

> In the middle Byzantine period we have two women who wrote in their own name, the liturgical poet Kassia or Kasiane (ninth century) and the historian Anna Komnene (twelfth). The obstacle we face in recovering their "voices" are different but perhaps equally insoluble …. The problem is that *all* texts are mediated by what [Elizabeth] Clark calls a "social-linguistic framework", not just those written by men about women. It is not clear how we can recover "voices" (assuming this means "authentic experience") from texts written by women. What is "authentic experience" anyway? … It is not clear that the subject that Clark seeks … exists. Do we even have access to our own "authentic" being, or are our own voices to ourselves not also mediated by ideology …?[47]

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[42] Smythe, 'Women as Outsiders', 149; also L. Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford 2016) 16: 'Among the most pervasive and foundational cultural values of Byzantine society was that authority naturally resided with men, and that support for masculine authority contributed to the proper and natural social order… virtuous femininity was expressed through submission to masculine authority'; L. James, 'Men, Women and Eunuchs: Gender, Sex and Power', in J. Haldon (ed.) *The Social History of Byzantium* (Malden, MA and Oxford 2009) 31-50.

[43] L. Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Patronage', in L. James (ed.) *Women, Men and Eunuchs,* 53.

[44] Neville, *Anna Komnene,* 15.

[45] Neville, *Anna Komnene,* 120-131.

[46] Smythe, 'Women as Outsiders', 149-150.

[47] A. Kaldellis 'The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions,' in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London 2010) 66-67; allusion to E.A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'', *Church History* 67.1 (1998) 1-31.

As referenced in the previous chapter, women play a role secondary to that of the emperors. Their role is at times that of unfair victims of a tyrant's violence, as is the case of Empress Zoe and Eudokia in Attaleiates' *History,* or that of perverters of the ideal order once they acquire the power to do so, as in the case of the *augusta* Skleraina in the *Synopsis*.[48] Some women can do both in the same narrative, as is the case of Zoe in Psellos' account: in my view, this reflects Zoe's lack of an explicit narrative arc and her position as a secondary character to the different emperors who reigned with her.[49] Narrators depict women as emotional and thus more eager to break social conventions, preferring immediate pleasure rather than respect for morals. They also underline the need for a male ruler in those occasions when empresses held power on their own, as in the reign of Zoe and Theodora in 1042, during Theodora's last months in power in 1056, and during Eudokia's regency in 1068.[50] When women reach power, narrators often mention the basic inadequacy of having women in charge without a male emperor ruling with them.[51]

The gendered mirror used to analyse women's actions in the narratives is also present when gazing at the other gender. Male characters are often portrayed in relation to their closeness to the masculine ideal, opposed to several traits traceable to the characters' effeminacy. One of the basic traits characterising men is that of ἀνδρεῖα, whose translation often encapsulates bravery and the word ἀνήρ, a man. Ideal men are brave, while cowardice is

[48] *Synopsis* 427.57-428.1, and 434.51-71; see E. Strugnell, 'The Representation of the Augustae in John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*', in *Byzantina Australiensia* 16 (2006) 120-136, esp. 136: 'Skylitzes overwhelmingly portrays women in positions of political power in an unfavourable light'.
[49] See pages 96-99 above for a discussion on Psellos' representation of the empress Zoe.
[50] In respect of Zoe and Theodora's rule, Psellos moves from praise in 6.1 towards utter criticism of their capacity to rule in 6.5, Attaleiates mentions Zoe's marriage in *History* 17-18/14.17-15.3, briefly and apparently without any need for justification; Skylitzes notes that there was a consensus on the need for an emperor in *Synopsis* 422.26-30; Theodora's sole reign is referred briefly by Skylitzes and Attaleiates, and the election of Michael is presented as an affair out of Theodora's control: *History* 51-52/41.9-42.6 *Synopsis* 480.31-40; Psellos even criticises her will to rule and manly, autocratic manners: 6b.1-3; concerning Eudokia's sole rule, Psellos pointed at her worry for her sons as the cause for the crucial mistake of marrying Romanos IV: 7b.4; Attaleiates underlines the need for an emperor in the times of Eudokia's sole rule: *History* 96-97/76.20-77.5.
[51] See pages 92-96 above.

often linked to effeminate men, in spirit or even corporeally, as in the case of eunuchs.[52] Eunuchs are held accountable for the empire's defeats, especially in the accounts of Attaleiates and Skylitzes.[53] Their depictions in the narratives often correspond to feminised characters, according to the pejorative image of females in Byzantium: selfish, dominated by passions, hiding their true intentions and finally being incapable of achieving anything good for the community. The rule of Michael IV is depicted in the *Synopsis* as the sinful combination of a passive, thus non-masculine emperor, and the effective rule of Michael's brother, the perverse eunuch John Orphanotrophos. John actively conspired against Romanos III in order to sit his brother on the throne; Michael felt remorse at this, but he passively accepted the facts and did not renounce to the crown, as Skylitzes remarked.[54] Psellos, perhaps responding to existing narratives on Michael's reign, cared to represent the emperor in a more active role in the *Chronographia*, particularly by underlining his involvement in suppressing the Bulgarian rebellion.[55]

Overall, Psellos mentioned eunuchs in a kinder way, not exploiting their alleged lack of masculinity for the sake of constructing a self-explanatory narrative. Basil the *parakoimomenos* and John Orphanotrophos, both eunuchs who became *de facto* rulers of the empire together with the "official" emperors, are described as flawed men – but what man is not, Psellos asks later in the narrative.[56] They become empathic characters though, as they are both stripped of their possessions and their dignity when their respective rulers ungratefully decided to disown them. Psellos' sympathetic portrayal of these figures may be related to the most intimate fears

[52] S. Tougher, 'Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to their Creation and Origin', in James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs,* 168-184; on the debate on the perception of eunuchs in Byzantium and their social roles: K. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, IL 2003), esp. 1-29.
[53] *History* 32-35/26.15-28.20, *Synopsis* 390 and 415.55-56.
[54] *Synopsis* 397.58-398.74 and 408.51-409.79.
[55] See chapter five on Michael's representation in the *Chronographia* as an almost-ideal ruler, especially pages 196, 224-226, and 233.
[56] *Chronographia* 6.26-27.

of a substantial portion of the intended audience: that, despite their good service, they could always fall into disgrace.

Attaleiates shows some explicit examples of the use of gender conventions when depicting the main tyrannical figure of his account, Michael VII Doukas. One of the first alleged decisions of this emperor in the narrative is to blind the previous emperor, Romanos IV, an excessively violent decision directed towards 'this man, who behaved toward you as a father both in law and fact'.[57] Furthermore, Michael's decision contravened the terms of the surrender, and was executed far halfway in Romanos' journey to Constantinople: acting through messengers and a Jewish executioner, Michael does not need to get his hands dirty.[58] This act of extreme impiety is portrayed as a subversion of familial values by Attaleiates. Nevertheless, Attaleiates later depicts Michael as a passive emperor, ruled by the eunuch Nikephoritzes. Attaleiates repeatedly draws attention to the emperor's passivity:

> When a report [of a Roman defeat] arrived and reached the emperor, it certainly seemed as though he was upset, yet he did not refrain from his political injustices, being swayed by Nikephoros' evil influence. Nor was he, as it turned out, opposed by nature to the kind of advice he was receiving.[59]

The depiction of Botaneiates, the hero of the narrative, is also crisscrossed by gender stereotypes. As referred to above, Attaleiates praises Botaneiates, and legitimises his position as emperor, by his capacity to perform ἀνδραγαθίαις, often translated as 'brave' or 'manly deeds'.[60] It is among the main qualities of the ruler, as reflected by Attaleiates in his dedication. While Michael lets things happen to him, Botaneiates acts. The narrative includes small mentions of his military actions before he even rebelled against the tyrant. There Botaneiates

[57] *History* 176/136.16-17: Τοῦτον τὸν πατρὸς ἐπὶ σοὶ πρᾶξιν εἰληφότα καὶ νόμῳ καὶ πράγματι…
[58] Later on, Attaleiates underlines the secrecy of Michael's pact with the Turks, aiming to defeat the rebellion led by his uncle and the Frank Rouselios. Though them manoeuvre could be seen as a rather common diplomatic move, Attaleiates' narrative is full of sympathy for Christian barbarians. Even further, Michael's conjure is aimed against his uncle, which adds elements of subversion to his actions.
[59] *History* 184/142.20-24: Ἀλλὰ τῆς φήμης ταύτης καταλαβούσης καὶ προσπεσούσης τῷ βασιλεῖ, ἔδοξε μὲν σκυθρωπόν τι παθεῖν, οὐ μὴν δὲ τῶν πολιτικῶν ἀδικημάτων ἀπέσχετο, ταῖς τοῦ Νικηφόρου κακαῖς ὑποθημοσύναις πειθόμενος, μηδὲ αὐτός, ὡς ἐφάνη, τὴν φύσιν ἔχων τοῖς συμβουλευομένοις ἀντίθετον.
[60] *History* 3/3.2-3.

reveals himself as a man of action who managed to inspire his subordinates and to keep them united, which is one of Attaleiates' main recommendations for the whole empire.[61] Opposed to a plague of thoughtless egotism, the narrator praises the man who brought the whole body politic together. Furthermore, Botaneiates' character is explained by his noble lineage, which is almost exclusively referred to by focusing on male predecessors, all of them – noticeably even Constantine the Great – great warriors above all.[62] Attaleiates also presents Botaneiates as the inheritor of past military glories, which may explain the abrupt inclusion in the *History* of a lengthy passage on the campaigns of Botaneiates' ancestor Nikephoros Phokas against the Cretan Saracens.

Narrators have an undeniable degree of autonomy in defining what is masculine and what is not: Skylitzes dwelled on criticising Michael IV as a passive emperor whose realm was *de facto* controlled by his eunuch brother Orphanotrophos.[63] Psellos however, though noting the eunuch's power at court, mostly overlooked any potentially subversive element of the situation. The *Chronographia* has fewer mentions of ἀνδρεῖα,[64] which can be partially explained by Psellos' lexical repertoire and his insistence on characterising each emperor in a unique way, instead of focusing on more mainstream, dualist depictions.[65] Papaioannou's research showed how Psellos built on extended gender conventions and distinguished between physical gender, innate personality and circumstance-based tendencies of the will.[66] As Jeffreys noted, 'Psellos' originality is to take the rare female *pathos* of Byzantine tradition and use it whenever he fancied'.[67] Such 'rhetorical gender', according to Papaioannou, allows Psellos to draw his

[61] *History* 39-43/32.12-35.9.
[62] *History* 212-238/163.24-183.23.
[63] *Synopsis* 392-415; Skylitzes is particularly fond of highlighting that Michael, though repented, did not solve the situation of tyranny he contributed to create: see note 54 in this chapter, on page 157.
[64] S. Papaioannou, 'Michael Psellos' Rhetorical Gender', *BMGS* 24 (2000), 145: there is one reference to ἀνδρεῖα in the *Chronographia*, opposed to 30 references in Anna Komnene's *Alexiad.*
[65] See pages 82-92 above.
[66] S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013) 192-231.
[67] M. Jeffreys, 'Michael Psellos and the Eleventh Century: A Double Helix of Reception', in M.D. Lauxtermann, and M. Whittow, *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017) 25.

audience' attention from a different perspective, embracing πάθος and other female roles and attributions when convenient.[68] For example, in a letter from Psellos to John Doukas reporting the birth of his grandson, Psellos presented himself as the woman receiving his man – the new-born – once he arrives from campaign covered in blood.[69]

4.1.3. Age, status, and species

Gender stereotypes can be found in multiple moral statements about different characters in the narratives, but they are not alone. Eve Davies noted that the different life stages for men and women marked the social expectations for that given character. In her analysis of hagiographical narratives, Davies pointed out how the Byzantines conceived the different life stages, how they differed concerning the gender of the person, and what each stage entailed. A child, for example, is expected to be shy, ignorant of certain affairs and emotional. Consequently, children who behave as adults are conceived as exceptional.[70] Although our narratives do not provide much information about the different life stages of the main characters, the narrators judge them either in terms of how they relate to the expectations of their age group, or by confirming their inadequacy to rule due to their age.

We find illustrative examples of the use of age stereotypes in several eleventh-century rulers. Psellos depicted Basil's character development as that of a young man who began his life surrounded by wealth, and thus stayed away from the serious matters of government, handing them over to his uncle, the *parakoimomenos* Basil. Only after two major rebellions menaced his power did Basil drastically change his character.[71] The case of Basil II constitutes an exception inasmuch as he was in power for decades. Other rulers are represented only in one life stage, and the narrator focuses on the character's ability to meet the expectations

[68] Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos,* 192-231; Papaioannou, 'Rhetorical Gender', 142.
[69] Pappaioannou, 'Rhetorical Gender', esp. 142; *Michael Psellos*, 195-200.
[70] E. Davies, 'Age, Gender and Status: A Three-Dimensional Life Course Perspective of the Byzantine Family', in L. Brubaker and S. Tougher (eds.), *Approaches to the Byzantine Family* (Farnham 2013) 153-176.
[71] *Chronographia* 1.4.5-9.

concerning his life stage. Basil's rival, Bardas Skleros, is only depicted as an old man, and thus easy to be convinced by others to act a certain way.[72] Again in the *Chronographia*, Romanos III and Zoe are mocked for their attempts to produce an offspring despite their old age. This anecdote, similar to others from the same passage, reflects Romanos' overambitious expectations of his own rule; he does not act within his real capacities.[73] Romanos III ends up being murdered by the empress Zoe, who already had another candidate for the throne in her mind: her young lover Michael IV.

After Michael's death in 1041, his nephew Michael V is depicted as a child in both age and character. He is unable to rule his own emotions despite hiding them behind a mask of compliance, and ends up subverting the court and the rule of the empire before being deposed.[74] The opposite happens under the rule of Michael VI, named 'the Old' by his detractors. Our three sources coincide – for once – in censuring Michael's rule based in his old age. He became a puppet of different court members, but that caused other aristocrats outside the court to rebel, and ultimately to depose him.[75] While Psellos ends the second part of his *Chronographia* by praising some of the key members of the ruling Doukas family, Attaleiates builds up his portrait of Michael VII Doukas as a tyrant by strengthening the role of Romanos IV, Michael's regent, as a father for him. Once Romanos IV is captured, his adoptive son Michael acts unfairly to him, and finally orders him to be blinded.

The depiction of age groups marginalised or considered further away from the ideal individual coincide, to an extent, with the depiction of both non-exemplary women and feminised men. Psellos' Michael V and Michael VI, due to their age, are passive, irrational, and definitely not examples of ἀνδρεῖα. Similar traits apply to Attaleiates' depiction of Michael

[72] *Chronographia* 1.16.
[73] *Chronographia* 3.5. The discussion of Romanos III belongs to the previous chapter, on pages 83-88.
[74] *Chronographia* 5.4-6.
[75] *Chronographia* 6b.20; *History* 52-53/42.6-12; *Synopsis* 480.31-40 and 482.79-483.22.

VII. The conclusion is that they are unable to put the right decisions and morals forward, and thus unable to lead their own lives wisely. In the case of Attaleiates' Michael VII, of Psellos' Romanos III, and of Michael V in both accounts, these emperors cannot rule over their own families, let alone the empire.[76] Overall, marginalised individuals and groups tend to resemble each other when opposed to the ideal character.

Beyond gender and age-based stereotypes, one can identify other sets of oppositions characterising an individual as ideal or not. One of these distinctions opposes righteous inhabitants of the empire and barbarians.[77] The depiction of either a barbaric character, or someone showing barbaric manners, has often to do again with the inability to rule over emotions, and to proceed rationally. Sometimes their depiction is directly oriented to what they lack in comparison with the Romans. That is the case of the barbarians chased by Isaak Komnenos in the *Chronographia*: Psellos defines them by pointing at their lack of military equipment, organisation and defences in times of war, their religion, and their manners concerning food and drink.[78] The barbarians, though sometimes described as more powerful

[76] Romanos III inability to be realistic on his plans for succession: *Chronographia* 3.5, his wife's affair and his own assassination 3.17-26; Michael V's castration of his family in *Chronographia* 5.42 and *History* 11-12/9.19-28; Michael VII sent his family to negotiate with the rebel Rouselios: *History* 189/146.2-4. In contrast with Michael's neglect of his mother Eudokia Makrembolitissa, his adoptive father and previous emperor Romanos IV treated her with due respect (101/80.9-12), same as Michael's successor Nikephoros Botaneiates (304/233.22-234.8). In the opinion of Krallis, Romanos' positive gestures towards Eudokia are mostly intended to reply to the negative portrait of that ruler in the *Chronographia*: D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012) 89-90; it seems more convincing to me to consider the *History* as standing on its own in this respect: the fair relationship between Romanos and Eudokia serves to define their reign as promising, just as Michael`s neglect of their family are meant to define him as a tyrant.

[77] Concerning middle Byzantine discourses on ethnicity, I will refer to some of the most recent publications: C. Roueché, 'Defining the Foreign in Kekaumenos', in D.C. Smythe (ed.), *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (Aldershot 2000) 203-213; P. Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge 2000); G. Boel, 'L'identité 'romaine' dans le roman *Digénis Akritis*', in H. Hokwerda (ed.), *Constructions of the Greek Past: Identity and Historical Consciousness from Antiquity to the Present* (Groningen 2003) 157-183; F. Kurta, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, c. 500 to 1050: The Early Middle Ages* (Edinburgh 2011); T.A. Kaplanis, 'Antique Names and Self-Identification: *Hellenes, Graikoi*, and *Romaioi* from Late Byzantium to the Greek Nation-State', in D. Tziovas (ed.), *Re-Imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture* (Oxford 2014) 81-97; A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA 2019); A.M. Feldman, *The Monotheisation of Pontic-Caspian Eurasia, 8th-13th Centuries* (Edinburgh 2020) [forthcoming].

[78] *Chronographia* 7.68-69; commented by A. Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*. *Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia, PA 2013), 100; Anthony Kaldellis argued that Psellos picked up the idea from Ammianus' depiction of the Huns (Amm. Marc. 31.2); see also W.Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*

than the Romans themselves, produce excessive violence due to their 'deviant' attitudes. Just as Psellos describes the Pechenegs as lacking proper cultural practices, Attaleiates depicted the barbarians as lacking consideration for their victims.[79]

Nevertheless, there is a degree of flexibility in both labelling a character as barbaric, and in defining the expectations of foreigners in the narrative. Attaleiates' brings into focus repeatedly the shared religion of Latins and Romans.[80] Even beyond the boundaries marked by Christianity, Attaleiates depicted some Turkish generals as gentle adversaries because of their treatment of the prisoners. It seems unlikely that Attaleiates is trying to show how the Turks aimed to imitate Roman gentleness, as argued by Pérez Martín.[81] It seems more likely that the narrator compared the Romans negatively with other peoples, as a means to suggest to his audience that the Roman people had lost their virtue; it was thereby in the audience's hands to recover it. As discussed above, Attaleiates criticises the Romans by arguing that some universal values were shared by different faiths, and the Romans (despite their knowledge of the Christian Revelation) ignored those basic moral rules.[82] This use of the barbarian characters in the *History* is not far from Psellos' depiction of the Arab adversaries of Romanos III as reasonable diplomats and warriors, also discussed above. Therefore, 'praiseworthy' barbarian characters do play a role in these narratives, often showing the possibility to overcome adversity for even marginal characters, and to underline the emperors' weaknesses. This role

Historians (Basingstoke and New York, NY 2007) 314 and 317, and also in W. Treadgold, 'The Byzantine World Histories of John Malalas and Eustathius of Epiphania', *The International History Review* 4 (2007) 709-745.

[79] *History* 82/65.6-26; Kaldellis, *Ethnicity after Antiquity*,116-117: Byzantine authors mostly used the Skythian as a model to identify themselves by contrast, also following Antique discourses; see also P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* (London 1986) 208, F. Hartog and J. Lloyd, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (Berkeley, CA and London 1988); R. Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA and London 2008).

[80] *History* 8-9/7.7-25, 46-47/37.10-38.4, 122-124/96.3-97.15, plus the overall depiction of the character of Rouselios, esp. 206-207/159.19-160.13; on Attaleiates' sympathy towards Latins, see pages 90-91 below.

[81] I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates: Historia*, 253, n. 123; Pérez Martín quoted Gentile, R., 'Tipologia della rappresentazione dei turchi in fonti bizantine dei secc. XI-XII', *ByzForsch* 25 (1999) 310-311; see note 31 in chapter 3, page 90.

[82] *History* 197/152.9-20.

is not so different from that of women or eunuchs being depicted as stronger than men. The account of John Kinnamos, written almost a century later, implies criticism of men who avoided participating in the cause, when presenting the leader of the defence, Aldruda Frangipane, as 'more generous than anyone else and, in particular, masculine'.[83] The role of so-called marginal elements of Byzantine society, once studied in the frame of these historical narratives, becomes much more dynamic than the mainstream image of simple alterity.

Another distinction between ideal or condemnable characters and attitudes is related to speciesism, or the hierarchies established by humans between them and other species of animals, or between different species of the animal kingdom.[84] By default, being labelled as an animal, more specifically by words such as θήρ, means distancing from the ideal. Psellos' account of the downfall of Michael V is exemplary of this negative depiction of animalism as opposed to an ideal human behaviour. Michael V, once at the top of his tyranny, is depicted as a beast (ὁ θήρ) when he decides to exile Empress Zoe by using lies against her.[85] Then the narrative records Zoe's speech when she is sent to exile, where she shows her fears of being devoured by beasts (δέδοικα γὰρ μὴ καὶ θηρσὶ βρῶμα προθήσουσιν) or drowning in the sea.[86] However, it is Michael himself who is captured by the enraged population of Constantinople, also compared to wild beasts when they entered the church where Michael was hiding (ὥσπερ δή τινες θῆρες),[87] and when the people dragged him out of the church by force, unlawfully and like beasts (παρανομεῖν ἐπεχείρησαν, ὡς θῆρας αὐτοὺς τῶν ἱερῶν ἀπελαύνοντες).[88] Psellos' subtle poetical justice nevertheless lacks any sympathy for those who deposed and blinded

[83] John Kinnamos, Epitome, 288 ἦν δέ γυνή, Ἰταλὴ μὲν τὸ γένος μεγαλόφρων δὲ εἴπερ τις καὶ ἀρρενωπὸς μάλιστα.
[84] On speciesism: D. LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca, NY 2009); O. Horta, 'What Is Speciecism?', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010) 243-266; R. Boddice, 'Introduction: The End of Anthropocentrism', in R. Boddice (ed.), *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2011) 1-20; on animals in Byzantium: I. Anagnostakis, T.G. Kolias, and E. Papadopoulou (eds.), *Animals and Environment in Byzantium* (Athens 2011).
[85] *Chronographia* 5.17.11.
[86] *Chronographia* 5.22.20-21.
[87] *Chronographia* 5.41.2.
[88] *Chronographia* 5.45.3-4.

Michael. Their animal-like behaviour is the ultimate product of the subversion originating inside Michael's character, and later extended over his subjects.

Michael's episode exemplifies how labelling some action or characters as 'beast-like' supports the narrative by qualifying that character or their action negatively. However, being labelled as a member of, or related to, a marginal group should not be interpreted as sheer criticism of that character. The difference is marked by the intertextual web and the type of discourse being carried out. Psellos himself compared the empire to an animal, focusing on analysing the functioning of its body and its slow decline into disease.[89] Earlier in the *Chronographia*, Psellos' depiction of John Orphanotrophos noted the political convenience of his fierce gaze, which helped him to keep the subjects loyal to his brother.[90] That expression is referred to by Psellos as beast-like (τὸ βλοσυρὸν τῷ θηρὶ): this animal trait can be included within one ideal type of ruler, namely that one who keeps the peace through inspiring awe amongst his potential opponents. Similarly to Orphanotrophos, the empress Zoe is depicted as a powerful yet potentially violent (and uncivilised) beast, namely a lioness, in Psellos' account.[91] As a way to legitimise Botaneiates' new law impeding the emperor to act violently against his subjects, the law linked emperors to the 'king bee', who needs to carry no weapon himself.[92] The possession of a beast-like aggressiveness, either in combat or in other aspects of life, could be regarded as either convenient or an aspect to criticise.

Furthermore, when a character is compared to a specific animal, the effect of such comparison as a qualifier of the character's morality often related, not to the distinction between animal and human behaviour, but to the perceived position of the given animal within

[89] *Chronographia* 6.48.1: ὥσπερ δὲ ἐρρωμένον ζῷον; also in 7.55.16; see pages 237-245 for a discussion on Psellos' conception of the bodies of emperors.
[90] *Chronographia* 4.12.14-16.
[91] *Chronographia* 4.17.
[92] L. Burgmann, 'A Law for Emperors: Observations on a Chrysobull of Nikephoros III Botaneiates', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992* (Aldershot 1994) 247-257, esp. 248.

the realm of different creatures. Empress Zoe, George Maniakes, John Tornikios and Romanos IV are all compared to lions and lionesses, indicating their strength and awe-inspiring attitude, but not necessarily pointing to a derogatory animalism in their behaviour.[93] Psellos also defined two styles in Constantine IX's approach to him, first as a fox and then as a lion, when he tried to dissuade him from abandoning the court. Both approaches seem free of criticism: animals mirror here different but equally valid kinds of human attitudes.[94] However, when Psellos compares Romanos III to a dog because of his unlawful decisions, or when Attaleiates describes the shouting of Bryennios' followers to barking (καθυλακτοῦσι), the insult comes from the pejorative position of the dog within the hierarchy as an ignoble animal.[95] Such is also the case when Isaak's barbaric rivals are described as hares (as in Attaleiates' *History*)[96] or as snakes (as in Psellos' *Chronographia*), lurking in their primitive huts in gullies and on cliffs.[97] This distinction within a marginalised group also pertains to other kinds of comparisons: when Attaleiates traces the ancestry of Nikephoros Botaneiates back to the Celtiberians, the expected response is not one of rejection of the emperor's barbaric ancestry, but one of admiration for Celtiberian courage.[98] We find a further example in Skylitzes' aforementioned depiction of Empress Aikaterine, who was the daughter of the Bulgarian tzar Ivan Vladislav, later married to Isaak Komnenos and then entering into the monastic life, taking the name *Xene* ('foreigner'). In an odd combination of humour and pious remark regarding her conversion to a nun, Empress

[93] *Chronographia* 4.17.3; 6.77.7; 6.102.8-9; 7b.10.16; in other accounts, such as the tenth-century recension of Liutprand of Cremona's embassy to Constantinople, the eastern and western Roman empires, together with the Sarracens, are depicted as competing animals, mirroring earlier accounts in which animals can represent archetypes of social groups or polities: Liutprand of Cremona, *Embassy to Constantinople* § 40-41.
[94] *Chronographia* 6.198.10-11: ἐπεὶ δὲ, τῆς ἡμέρου πειθοῦς ἀπεγνώκει, τὴν κερδαλῆν ἀφεὶς, τὴν λεοντῆν ἐπενδύεται· καί μοι ἐπανατείνει τὸ ῥόπαλον; By comparing Constantine's attitude to a lion and adding a reference to a club wielded against him, Psellos also connects Constantine to the heroic though fallible figure of Herakles.
[95] *Chronographia* 3.15.11-12: καὶ τὴν ἀνόμου θυσίαν ὡς κυνὸς βδελυσσόμενος; *History* 243/187.14; being called a 'dog' was meant to be an insult in Middle Byzantium, as in *Digenis Akritis:* E 1.29 (αὐτὸς σκυλὶ Ρωμαῖος ἔν') and E 1.129 (ὦ ἀμιρά, πρωτοαμιρὰ καὶ σκύλε τῆς Συρίας).
[96] *History* 67/53.29-54.1.
[97] *Chronographia* 7.68.30: καὶ ἐμφωλεύουσιν ὥσπερ ὄφεις φάραγξι βαθείαις.
[98] *History* 222/171.5-8: Οἱ οὖν τὴν Ἰβηρικὴν οἰκοῦντες ἄνδρες ἀνδρειότατοί τε ὄντες καὶ ἰσχυρῶς παλαμώμενοι διαπαντὸς τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις ἀντεπολέμουν καὶ καρτερίας ἔργα καὶ ἀρετῆς κατ' αὐτῶν ἐπεδείκνυντο.

Aikaterine declared that 'nothing strange had befallen her in exchanging one kingdom for another', both alluding to her former move from Bulgaria to Byzantium, and to her future transition to afterlife, the kingdom of Heaven.[99]

4.1.4. Light and imperial regalia

There are some particularly symbolic elements at play in Byzantine qualification of characters: light and imperial regalia. They constitute two poles in the balance between universality and social construction of symbolic elements in narratives. Light and bright elements have been associated with positivity and health across cultures, while the particularities of Byzantine ceremonials have attracted the attention of modern outsiders.[100] Both groups of elements bring values consolidated by other narratives that we can expect were shared between narrator and audience, and are therefore quite useful in qualifying our characters with few words.

Imperial regalia is used in our narratives to symbolise imperial power and the character's relation to it. The symbolism of these objects varies slightly depending on the narrative, and even within each narrative. Let us return to the reign of Isaak Komnenos as depicted in the *Continuation*. Despite using the structure from the *History* for narrating the episode of the patriarchal exile, Skylitzes substitutes Attaleiates' more vague references to Keroularios' arrogance with the description of more specific, outright heterodox gestures. Not only the patriarch declared that he could depose Isaak, Skylitzes argues, but he wore the purple boots, claiming to revive an ancient custom. Keroularios even remarked that there was little difference between the emperor's position and his own.[101] Therefore, Isaak's decision to depose Keroularios seems to be more justified in the *Continuation*. Furthermore, the readers of the account, in comparison with the audience of the *History*, could read Isaak's decision to carry

[99] *Continuation* 110.6-7 and 111.7-8.
[100] H. Bodin, ''Into Golden Dusk': Orthodox Icons as Objects of Late Modern and Postmodern Desire', in I. Nilsson and P. Stephenson (eds.), *Wanted, Byzantium: The Desire for a Lost Empire* (Uppsala 2014) 201-216.
[101] *Continuation* 104-105.

the patriarch on a mule, instead of a horse, as a symbolic relocation of Keroularios to his proper place. The purple shoes, added into the narrative by Skylitzes, played a significant role in framing the extent of Keroularios' threat to the natural state of affairs to the Byzantine reader.

Something similar can be found in the first book of the *Chronographia*, where Psellos indicates the absolute victory of Basil II against Skleros by forcing the latter to renounce even his purple sandals.[102] Michael IV's later renunciation of the same sandals once he entered the monastery symbolises his pious abandonment of his life as emperor,[103] while Constantine IX's promise to clothe Romanos Boilas with the purple represents a mistake and a proof of the ill manners of Constantine's government.[104] Attaleiates regards the renunciation of the imperial regalia by Michael VI and Romanos IV as an act of piety and self-sacrifice while Michael VII's decision to remove the imperial insignia from his mother Eudokia is heavily criticised. Thus, Attaleiates materialised his characters' capacity of self-abnegation by highlighting their attitude towards concrete imperial garments.[105]

Light is perhaps one of the most straightforward elements in pointing out a character's benevolence. A long-standing literary tradition also associated the sun with benign forces and awe, and also with the emperor himself.[106] Light shining on different characters or their surroundings often strengthens the encomiastic tone of a story. Attaleiates uses luminous elements in describing the patriarch Constantine Leichoudes and Romanos IV.[107] When an element of the story is defined as λαμπρός or 'brilliant', its role is almost invariably positive or

[102] *Chronographia* 1.27.
[103] *Chronographia* 14.54.
[104] *Chronographia* 6.149.
[105] *History* 59/47.11-14; 177/136.18-19; 304/233.22-26.
[106] The phenomenon goes as far as the cult of Sol Invictus and its reception in Byzantium: see MacCormick, M., Eternal victory: triumphal rulership in late antiquity: Byzantium and the early medieval west (Cambridge 1990); M. Amerise 'Monotheism and the monarchy. The Christian emperor and the cult of the Sun in Eusebius of Cesarea', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 50 (2007), 72-84.
[107] *History* 93/73.28-29 and 101/80.12-21.

encomiastic.[108] Botaneiates later began his rebellion in the city of Lampe, a detail that Attaleiates connected to a bright star coming from the east to the city, signalling Botaneiates' future rule.[109] The opposite to light – darkness, clouds, or the night (ἀχλύος, σκότος, νύχτα) – are associated with exposure to danger and confusion[110] or, in the case of Psellos' depiction of Basil II, an absence of the imperial opulence in his clothing.[111] The main source of light, the sun, is associated with a prominent position in the celestial hierarchy from Antiquity onwards, and thus is linked both with the emperor and the benign light coming out of him. Botaneiates, the hero of the *History*, outshone other potential candidates to the throne 'as the sun outshines the stars'.[112] On the opposite side, Psellos describes the decline in the health of Constantine Monomachos as a sun obscured by clouds.[113]

Other less frequent symbols used to characterise the ruler have to do with memorable characters and stories from both the Greco-Roman and Biblical past. As in the other cases, the efficacy of these references lies in the supposed familiarity of the audience with them, and the ability of the narrator to play with the audience's expectations. For example, the figure of Alexander the Great is evoked by Psellos as an unattainable model of conduct by an overambitious Romanos III, an attainable model for Isaak's imperial reforms, and as a proof of the imperfection of even the finest men when describing Constantine IX.[114] Attaleiates uses Alexander's memory twice to show how Nikephoros Botaneiates and his father Michael imitated, and even surpassed him.[115] A more recent model for the characters described is Basil II. His prestige means that narrators associate praiseworthy characters with him. Zoe's exile is

[108] An exception to the rule can be found in the *Chronographia* 7.59, when Psellos criticised those irresponsible rulers who spent the empire's wealth in superfluous spectacles.
[109] *History* 241-242/185.27-186.19.
[110] *Chronographia* 6.90; 6.148.7-8; 6.198.6-8; 7.46.17-19; 7.82.10; *History* 299/230.12.15.
[111] *Chronographia* 1.31.
[112] *History* 96/76.23-24: ὡς διαφέρων τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον ἀστέρων ἥλιος.
[113] *Chronographia* 6.124.
[114] *Chronographia* 3.8, 7.58, and 6.163.
[115] *History* 231/178.1-17; 280/215.18-25.

all the more dramatic in the *Chronographia* once the empress mentions Basil's love for her.[116] Later in the narrative, Psellos describes a moribund but still lucid Isaak Komnenos remembering some of Basil's sayings and anecdotes.[117] Basil holds a model position in Psellos' global narratives on the ups and downs of the empire during his lifetime.[118] Attaleiates associates Nikephoros Botaneiates with Basil's life.[119] Finally, Skylitzes criticised Michael IV's alteration of Basil's tax system in the theme of Nikopolis, for it led to the theme's rebellion.[120] These examples illustrate our authors' use of comparative symbolic analogies in order to successfully communicate with their audience. Our three narrators used, to an extent, similar sets of conventions in their narratives in order to qualify their characters and their actions. However, each narrative diverged on their emphasis on different conventions – as seen above, Psellos did not exploit stereotypical portraits of eunuchs as Skylitzes did – and in the manner in which they applied them to one or another aspect of the different events narrated.

4.2. Causality in the sources

In this chapter, I have brought some of the key elements used by our narrators to qualify characters. As revealed in the previous chapter, eleventh-century Byzantine narratives focus on the description of the different emperors. Their character and actions play a role, sometimes decisive, in explaining the historical causality in the accounts.

In this respect, the four accounts clearly show a number of similarities. They all three, for example, explained some sort of fiasco, either military or administrative, by accusing some

[116] *Chronographia* 5.22, also in 6.158.
[117] *Chronographia* 7.76.
[118] *Chronographia* 6.63, 91, and 7.52.
[119] *History* 229-234/176.26-180.26, esp. 233-234/180.8-26; *Material for History* 1.1.
[120] *Synopsis* 412.67-76.

flawed or marginal character of committing crucial mistakes.[121] However, there also differences, and in the next section I will focus on some of the particularities of each one of the accounts separately, in the context of recent debates on the argument of each narrative.

4.2.1. Psellos and platonic harmony

Despite the abundance of essays on Psellos and his oeuvre, not much has been explicitly discussed concerning the historical causality of his *Chronographia*. This lack of debate may be due to Psellos' apparent ambiguity, or to the researchers' focus on other kinds of questions – from mining factual information to more localised research on particular tropes and themes. Examining how causality is represented throughout the *Chronographia* also requires stepping into epistemological questions: what, and how, did Psellos know about the world and, by extension, how do humans in general learn about it and communicate it to others?[122]

Kaldellis' monograph, however, did explore historical causality in the *Chronographia*. Kaldellis described Psellos' historical narrative as an encoded message that, secretly but strongly, advised mistrusting the efficacy of traditional Byzantine conventions and practices. To these conventions, Kaldellis argues, Psellos opposed the 'true philosophy' that arrived at court during Isaak Komnenos' reign. This philosophy is what an effective government needs, a code of behaviour not constrained by old-fashioned conventions but rather efficacious in stabilising the government of the empire and keeping enemies away. For Kaldellis, the *Chronographia* shows what truly works in politics, and mocks what rulers expected to work. All in all, Kaldellis identifies that positive message of the *Chronographia* with a number of formulae that, as we shall see, have more to do with modern assumptions than with Psellos' perspective on the matter. In the beginning of his monograph, Kaldellis argued that Psellos

[121] *Chronographia* 6.83-84 and 7.14 although, as mentioned above, Psellos' thoughts on eunuchs are far from systematic in comparison with the other two authors; *History* 33/26.19; 33/27.25; 37/30.21-23; with the noteworthy exception of John of Side in 180/139.10-18; but shortly followed by the negative depiction of Nikephoritzes immediately afterwards in 180/139.23; *Synopsis* 390.72-74 and throughout Michael IV's reign.
[122] See pages 42-58 above for the discussion on modern scholarly approaches towards Psellos' *Chronographia*.

'had many other interests, and more urgent ones, than theoretical metaphysics'.[123] The lessons of the *Chronographia,* for Kaldellis, have more to do with the intrinsic amorality of power games. Although Kaldellis' analysis of the *Chronographia* is particularly helpful when pinpointing what sort of ideas Psellos depicted as useless (either by including a subtle satirical passage or by openly dismissing such ideas)[124] I find his evaluation of what does work for Psellos in the historical process to be less convincing.

Psellos' account of the naval expedition of the Rus to Constantinople provides an example. In his narrative, Psellos first explains the invasion as a result of Constantine Monomachos' short-sighted rule: the emperor did not see the enemy coming despite their years-long preparation and their cultivation of a barbaric hatred for the Romans.[125] Therefore, it is Constantine's fault that the invasion came into existence in the first place, for he did not cut the project down before it even started. However, later sections of the account show the Roman fleet operating correctly: Constantine descended to the docks overnight to supervise the preparations and, in the morning, the Roman fleet emerged victorious despite the large number of enemy ships. As the Russian fleet had begun its retreat, according to Psellos, natural force intervened against them:

> Suddenly the sun attracted a mist off the low-lying land (most of the horizon consisted of high ground) and the weather changed. A strong breeze blew from east to west, ploughed up the sea with a hurricane, and rolled waves down on the

[123] A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Michael Psellos'* Chronographia *(*Boston, MA 1999) 7; from Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, 80; however, Psellos seemingly considered Platonic thoughts to have risen from the observation of the physical world: Michael Psellos, *Philosophica Minora,* vol. 2, 112-114; this text has been previously discussed by L.G. Benakis, *Βυζαντινή φιλοσοφία: κείμενα και μελέτες* (Athens 2002) 395; A. del Campo Echevarría, *La teoría platónica de las ideas en Bizancio (siglos IX-XI)* (Madrid 2012) 204-213; B. Tatakis, *La philosophie byzantine* (Paris 1959 [1949]) 207; L.G. Westerink, 'Exzerpte aus Proklos' Enneaden-Kommentar bei Psellos', *BZ* 52 (1959) 1-10, esp. 10; C. Zervos, *Un philosophe néoplatonicien du XIe siècle: Michel Psellos, sa vie, son oeuvre, ses luttes philosophiques, son influence* (Paris 1920) 150-151.

[124] Examples of a potential satirical reading in the *Chronographia* are the depiction of Phokas' poisoning in 1.16, Romanos' depiction with the mantle of the virgin in 3.10-11, or Zoe's 'piety' in 6.65-67; Kaldellis discussed these passages in Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 62-66 and 111-112; Duffy referred to Zoe's 'pious' rituals as a veiled example of theurgic rites in J. Duffy, 'Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals to the Theory and Practice of Magic: Michael Psellos and Michael Italikos', in H. Maguire, *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, DC 1995) 88-90; and Jeffreys noted Psellos' sarcasm in placing the depiction of Zoe's 'piety' as a distraction for the reader from the emperor's sexual *affairs* with the *augusta* Skleraina: M. Jeffreys, 'Double Helix of Reception', 24.

[125] *Chronographia* 6.90-95.

> barbarians …. So a great massacre of barbarians took place and a veritable stream of blood reddened the sea: one might well believe it came down the rivers off the mainland.[126]

The reference to the rising sun and the east-west direction of a powerful wind deciding the battle sounds quite similar to other episodes from narratives prior to, or contemporary with Psellos. In these stories, divine aid is granted by a God who intercedes in human affairs through natural catastrophes. A clear example can be found in the account of Isaak in the *History* of Attaleiates: the emperor was almost killed by a blizzard and a falling tree, both signs of divine rage.[127] But Psellos does not make an explicit mention to any divinity in his passage. Kaldellis considers God's absence from the narrative a statement in itself:

> A search of the entire *Chronographia* does not reveal a single event ascribed to Providence that cannot also be given (and almost always is) a purely human cause. In other words, God is entirely unwilling, or unable, to change the course of non-human nature. In his account of the naval battle between the Byzantines and the Rus' in 1043, Psellos turn down a perfect opportunity for such an interpretation: a wind suddenly blew up against the barbarian invaders giving the victory to the Byzantines. There is no hint of Providence in the entire passage.[128]

However, it seems unlikely that the audience would read the passage as an empty lip-service, or as a proof of God's absence. Instead, the meteorological passage is expected to show the cosmic retribution of a ruler, Constantine, who had already made the right tactical decisions in battle – after all, by the time the weather changed, the Rus army was already in disarray.[129] For Kaldellis, the fact that supra-human forces intervene after humans got it right shows Psellos' lack of faith in the former.[130] I rather read this passage as Psellos' support for specific human practices that, once attained, lead to a superhuman intervention. The intervening force is not

[126] *Chronographia* 6.95.7-18: Καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἀθρόον νεφέλην ἐφελκυσάμενος κάτωθεν, ἐπειδὴ πολύ τι τοῦ ὁρίζοντος μετεώριστο, μετατίθησι τὸν ἀέρα, καὶ ὃς πνεῦμά τι τῶν ἰσχυρῶν ἐξ ἀνατολῆς ἐπὶ δύσιν κινεῖ, καὶ λαίλαπι χαράξας τὴν θάλασσαν ἐπὶ τὸ βάρβαρον ἐπαιγίζει τὰ κύματα· … Γέγονέ τε τῶν βαρβάρων φόνος πολὺς, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐκ ποταμῶν ἄνωθεν ῥευμάτιον ὡς ἀληθῶς φόνιον τὴν θάλασσαν κατεφοίνισσεν.
[127] *History* 66-68/53.13-54.22.
[128] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 107; see also Katsaros, 'Το δραματικό στοιχείο, 302, who closely follows Kaldellis' argument: Katsaros argues that, while Attaleiates considered the divine to be at the centre of historical causation, Psellos allocated humans at the centre ('ὁ Ψελλὸς μεταφέρει τὸ ἐπίκεντρο στὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ στὶς πολυποίκιλες ἐκδηλώσεις του'), which can be corroborated only partially, as will be argued below.
[129] *Chronographia* 6.95.6-7.
[130] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 107.

further described in the passage itself, but is clearly set as a superhuman reaction to human operations in accordance, or not, with the Neoplatonic notions of harmony. As Psellos tried to analyse historical causality, he relied on the same Neoplatonic concepts that he used in his other works, as discussed in the introduction of our author. Just as he explained the phenomenon of being amazed by an icon as a combination of the 'natural' image and the 'supernatural' prototype projected through the artwork, he explains the development of political affairs on the grounds of characters matching with the an ideal order that, in the case of Psellos, is heavily linked to Neoplatonic concepts. These elements, exemplified below and throughout the next chapter, include elements such as the simplicity of body shapes (the circle in particular), a given character's preference of quality over quantity, and their capacity to match ideal spatial hierarchies.[131]

While Kaldellis draws a line between the human and the divine, a close reading of the *Chronographia* instead suggests that Psellos' line separates bodies in harmony with the cosmic order and different kinds of deformities, traceable to the character's *ethoi* and actions.[132] One of the most famous invectives of Psellos against members of the church 'who imitated the angelic beings… the Naziraeans of our time', criticises them for acting contrary to their real human nature, and for their lack of harmony between their soul and heavenly affairs.[133]

But what are then these desired values, or codes of behaviour, that ensured victory? It seems significant that the two fleets seem to choose different tactics in battle: the massive numbers of the Russian fleet are firstly confronted by two of the best Roman ships only. These ships were first surrounded by the Rus fleet, but the latter were ultimately unable to beat them

[131] C. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2017) 61-98; see chapter 5; on the importance of circular shapes, see, for instance, Michael Psellos, *Letter to John Xiphilinos* § 5.
[132] Following my argument from chapter 3 (see pages 83-88 below), I consider that Psellos' focus in the *Chronographia* is essentially in the depiction of the *ethos* of certain emperors and how their character influenced the course of both their private and the political life.
[133] *Chronographia* 6.18; see page 220 below.

down before the remaining Roman fleet moved forward and broke the Rus lines. Psellos' advice to meet high numbers with a smaller but more qualified force is consistently repeated throughout the *Chronographia*. For instance, Michael V is depicted, in his tyrannical delusion, choosing the support of the people over the aristocrats, simply because the people were more numerous – a completely misguided argument in Psellos eyes.[134] While a delusional Romanos III relied on his numbers for his Syrian campaign, the rebel Georgios Maniakes marched towards Constantinople only followed by a small, elite company, even though crowds formed by people of all ages were joining his side. The former was wrong and the latter was right, Psellos reminds the audience: Maniakes 'knew that victories are not won by mere numbers, but by skill and experience'.[135] During Romanos IV Diogenes' campaigns, Psellos criticised the emperor's decision to march with all his army.[136] Even more forces joined Romanos later. With these details, Psellos seems to underline Romanos' misguided ways, choosing quantity over quality, right before his disastrous defeat at Manzikert.[137]

Psellos' preference for quality over superior numbers seems to work as a maxim for a wide range of situations in the narrative, from military affairs to medical and architectural advice. It is not the only recurrent advice provided by Psellos. Back to the battle, we can note how the movements of the two Byzantine ships towards the enemy fleet are described as ὁμαλῶς and εὐκινήτως, roughly translated as 'evenly' and 'agile' respectively, both terms used

[134] *Chronographia* 5.15; A. Kaldellis, *TBR*, 92 analysed Psellos' words from the complete opposite perspective, arguing that Michael's attempt to attract, not only élite elite members, but also commoners to his cause, was a smart political move.
[135] *Chronographia* 6.82-83, quote from 6.82.3-5: ὁ δὲ, ἐπειδὴ μὴ τοῖς πλήθεσιν, ἀλλὰ ταῖς τέχναις καὶ ταῖς ἐμπειρίαις ᾔδει τὰ τρόπαια κατορθούμενα…; similarly, Bardas Phokas is represented as a victorious rebel because of his capacity to keep a small group of rebels united under one purpose against the superior forces of Basil II, a way of thinking shared by Basil himself in another section of the account: *Chronographia* 1.25 and 33.
[136] *Chronographia* 7b.13.1.
[137] *Chronographia* 7b.18.10-11; we can find similar judgements on Psellos' analysis of the civil war between Michael VI, who had the largest army yet was defeated, and Isaak's troops, who were fewer but well trained: *Chronographia* 7.11.

frequently in the writings of Platonic philosophers and mathematicians.[138] Another decisive element for the Byzantine victory, Psellos mentioned, was the position of the Byzantine sailors – and of the emperor Constantine and Psellos themselves – above the smaller Russian vessels, which are another indication of what mattered to Psellos.[139]

These elements were not picked by Psellos randomly, nor related to widespread contemporary military advice, but are connected with Neoplatonic formulae repeated in several of Psellos' works. These formulae underline several hierarchies in forms and creatures. Harmonious bodies and round shapes occupy positions according to the ideal perfection, and closer to the sky than to earth.[140] Psellos' own accomplishment, in his own words, is to have closed the circle of philosophy, namely to restore it to his former glory.[141] Once these principles are kept, success follows, as shown in the naval battle, as seen above: the emperor was on high ground, supervising the scene as two of his biggest ships charged against a larger enemy force, and defeated them by striking the sailors from above with projectiles. Only at the end of the passage, do these references to Psellos' ideal order become all the more explicit, shown when the sun itself provoked a decisive change in the battle.[142]

These principles, though in appearance distant from the morals discussed above, are reconciled with some of the mainstream explanations of the world in the *Chronographia*. For instance, Psellos inserted these values in a mostly negative portrait of Constantine IX Monomachos as a man who often became a victim of lower desires. Constantine opened the

[138] Data from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*: ὁμαλῶς is a Word used most frequently authors such as Theon, Galen, Plutarch, Ptolemy, Simplicius of Cilicia, Psellos and Proklos; εὐκινήτως is widely used by Proklos and John Italos.
[139] *Chronographia* 6.93.19-21 and 6.94.11-12.
[140] Pl. Ti. 33b on the perfection of the circle, and 91d-92c on the hierarchies in the animal world; also Aristotle defined the sciences focused in lesser principles as the most exact ones: Ar. *Metaph.* 1.982a-b; another reference to the circle in other Psellian texts: Del Campo Echevarría, *La teoría platónica*, 220 and Michael Psellos, *Philosophica Minora*, vol. 2, § 13, pp. 22-24; see also *Letter to John Xiphilinos* § 2-3 on the importance of the 'invisible lines' for a correct understanding of the cosmos, and Plato's recognition of a field of phenomena that is beyond logics.
[141] *Chronographia* 6.38.
[142] *Chronographia* 6.90-95.

gates of the senate to a multitude of vagabonds, and deformed the empire by adding new limbs and parts to a formerly harmonic creature.[143] Psellos later explains how the emperor acted appropriately in the battle only because of his irrational beliefs in some prophecies that predicted his victories.[144] By adding this explanation, Psellos connects the flawed character of Constantine with his circumstantial victory over the Rus. Awareness of meeting the Neoplatonic ideals is not required for succeeding in the *Chronographia*, a narrative populated by fallible characters that, from time to time, achieve some victory through their right choices. Psellos, the trustworthy historian, philosopher, and imperial advisor, is there to tell us what the *real* causes were, beyond the beliefs of the people in charge. Eventually, all the main characters will have to pay the price of their own asymmetries, shown in their bodily diseases and mismanagement of the political body.[145] However, at this point in the narrative, Psellos has to explain how a fallible character repels the Rus from Constantinople. Through his narration, Psellos promotes his Neoplatonic ideals, his own position as a master of these rules, and also his criticism of Constantine's rule.

The link between Psellos' explanation of historical causality in the *Chronographia* to Neoplatonism that I am suggesting is corroborated by ongoing research on Psellos' philosophy.[146] What Psellos does is far more than a detailed evaluation of his characters: he connects them to his particular conception, not only of human nature, but also of the forces ruling the cosmos. In the next chapter, I will expand my analysis to Psellos' use of narrative space – there, once again, we can appreciate his Neoplatonic view of politics and history in practice.

[143] *Chronographia* 6.29 and 7.55.
[144] *Chronographia* 6.96-98.
[145] See pages 237-245 below.
[146] See pages 56-58 above.

4.2.1. Attaleiates, omens and divine providence

In 2003, Martin Hinterberger published an extensive article on causality in the *History*. His approach was descriptive, picking up the diverse subjects that, according to the text, were at the origin of the different events.[147] Later, Krallis proposed a different approach to the matter. Pointing to the fact that 'reasoned human action and divine intervention are often paired', Krallis proposed to 'untangle this unlikely causal duo' considering most of the references to the divine as superfluous.[148] Krallis later distinguished elements from the narrative that are not 'textual accoutrement'. Following the line of earlier researchers such as Pérez Martín, he linked the narrator's use of omens and portents to 'the outgrowth of Attaleiates' desire to build up his persona as an advisor to the empire's leaders', not a sign of genuine faith, 'which remains ill defined behind a thin veil of conformity'.[149] Thus, according to Krallis, Attaleiates' emphasis on omens is either superfluous to the story, a means to an end for the author's self-promotion, or a subtle way to criticise Christian conventions.[150]

However, Attaleiates shows a consistent attention to the role of extra-human entities in historical causality and its relation to human agency. From the very beginning of the account, in the second sentence of the dedication, Attaleiates takes care to equate divine and human agency in the election of emperor Botaneiates, as two sides of the same coin. The section reads as two verses ending in the same sound, evoking a balance between two principles: Βασιλεύσας

[147] M. Hinterberger, 'Φόβω κατασεισθείς: τα πάθη του ανθρώπου και της αυτοκρατορίας στο Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτη. Το αιτιολογικό σύστημα ενός ιστοριογράφου του 11ου αιώνα', in V. N. Vlyssidou (ed.), *The Empire in Crisis (?) Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025-1081)* (Athens 2003) 155-167.
[148] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 172, and also in 43.
[149] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 172; Krallis also linked Attaleiates' mention to certain 'embellishments' present in the account to the representation of omens, thus underlining their secondary position in the *History*: Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor, Holy Patriarch: A New Reading of the Clash between Emperor Isaakios I Komnenos and Patriarch Michael Keroularios in Attaleiates' *History*', *BSl* 67 (2009) 170; Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, ix-x, considers the representation of omens in the *History* as proof of Attaleiates' servitude to superstition and his aim to achieve some damatic climax in his narrative.
[150] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 172-173 and 206 and 209-211.

δὲ ψήφῳ Θεοῦ / καὶ ἱκεσίᾳ πάντων ὁμοῦ / καὶ συνθήκῃ τῶν τὰ σὰ γινωσκόντων ὑπερφυῆ προτερήματα,[151]

Attaleiates invariably points to the importance of omens and divine providence. As opposed to Psellos' explanation of historical causality in the particularities of his philosophical argumentation,[152] Attaleiates mostly points at mainstream morals of his time, the neglect of which result in superhuman, often catastrophic, consequences.[153] Early in the narrative, stories such as the deposition of Michael V show the relevance of a supreme Justice, triggered when emperors step outside their boundaries. As discussed above, Michael's deposition is rooted in his ingratitude to his benefactor, the empress Zoe. Similarly, his successor Constantine IX dies when he is about to raise new taxes, an unlawful decision fuelled by the emperor's greed, according to Attaleiates. His death even deprived him of the possibility to name an heir, as Attaleiates made sure to mention.[154] The account of the following ruler, Michael VI, became in practice the story of Isaak Komnenos' accession to the throne through a fratricidal war, for which he would surely – according to Attaleiates – receive an appropriate punishment in hell.[155] Even Patriarch Keroularios, who betrayed Michael by opening the city to Isaak, plays a role as both an ungrateful subject of the former – thus his exile follows as a proof of divine punishment – and as a martyr figure who further vilifies Isaak's depiction.[156] Constantine X is first depicted

[151] *History* 3/3.10-11: 'Ruling by the will of God / and the unanimous pleading / and consent of all who are aware of your extraordinary advantages'.
[152] Barber, *Contesting the Logic*, 65-69: Psellos 'sought to bring ancient philosophy to bear on Christian problems and thence to achieve a better grounded theology and a more rigorous intellectual life in the monastery'.
[153] This moral basis in the *History* even includes the first reign depicted in the book, namely that of Michael IV: this section of the narrative has received little attention, possibly because of its brevity and random-looking scope; and yet, it conveys a moral message all the same: López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano'.
[154] *History* 50-51/40.13-41.7.
[155] *History* 69-70/55.18-56.10.
[156] The fate of the patriarch Michael Keroularios as represented in the *History* has been further discussed above (see note 81 from chapter 3, on page 105); in opinion of Spadaro, the apparently inconsistent trait of Keroularios' depiction derives from Attaleiates' use of different sources, one supportive of the patriarch and another one condemnatory: M.D. Spadaro La deposizione di Michele VI: un episodio di «concordia discors» fra chiesa e militari', *JÖB*, 37 (1987), esp. 155 on Attaleiates' ambivalent verdict towards Keroularios, and 156 on Attaleiates' sources for the episode; Isaak's decision to exile the patriarch is called a 'sin' (ἁμαρτάδα), thus underlining its moral dimension: *History* 66/52.21.

as a pious ruler (and consequently protected by God from an early *coup d'état*) but later becomes greedy and is held responsible for military disasters in the east, and diverse signals of divine rage appear.[157] Smaller stories of specific military campaigns either evoke mainstream tales of effeminate losers fighting masculine victors, or echo later episodes of the account, referring to Michael's unlawful punishments of Romanos IV and Rouselios.[158]

The reign of Romanos IV, further analysed in chapter six, follows an overall scheme close to the stories of Michael V and Constantine X, though it becomes more detailed and dramatic at times. Romanos' ascension to the throne and first campaign show the efficacy of the values of bravery and self-sacrifice continuously promoted by Attaleiates. However, Attaleiates tells us that Romanos relaxed in the following campaigns: close to the ideal ruler at the beginning of his reign, Romanos later neglected his task, and military failure and proofs of divine rage become two aspects of the same cosmic response to Romanos' weakness.[159] Finally, the longest section of Attaleiates' account, dedicated to the tyranny of Michael VII and the successful rebellion of Botaneiates, promotes the same values, and promises divine retribution to those who disregard these rules. In his lengthy discourse contrasting the values of ancient and contemporary Romans, Attaleiates first lamented his contemporaries' neglect of the ancestral laws; he then elaborated on the multiple ways the ancient Romans detected signals of divine displeasure and appeased the divinity; finally concluding that none of this was accomplished in his time.[160] While Michael's tyranny allows Attaleiates to include laments for the Romans who 'think that they will evade the Sleepless Eye', and episodes on the internal corruption of the state lead to depictions of disastrous combats against external enemies,[161]

[157] See page 281 below.
[158] See note 34 on page 194, chapter 5, for some examples of this narrative element.
[159] See pages 278-287.
[160] The three sections commented above are *History* 193-194/149.19-150.12, 194-195/150.12-151.1, and 195-197/151.1-152.20.
[161] *History* 196/151.21-22; for example, the episode on the capture of the general Isaak Komnenos follows the depiction of a corrupt Nikephoros: *History* 183-184/141.21-142.25 and 180-183/139.21-141.20, respectively.

Botaneiates' ascension is celebrated since 'where God is worshiped, everything else he considered secondary'.[162] While omens were mostly ignored by earlier rulers and were only accessible to the most aware onlookers, Botaneiates' ancestor Nikephoros Phokas is depicted, finally, attending to ominous signal when it comes, and thus evading divine wrath and succeeding in his enterprise.[163] Moreover, the fact that Phokas and Theodosios, both figures linked to Botaneiates by blood and by profession, were represented as a reader of ominous signals and a man who cared to follow the divine will respectively, invites us to revise Krallis' identification of successful omens with non-Christian values.[164] Omens in the *History* were compatible with Orthodox piety, characters, and symbols.

Krallis' reading of the *History* suggested that Attaleiates' reference to omens, piety and divine intervention, showed his belief that humans, though unable to predict the future with complete accuracy, can – and must – be prepared for the unexpected.[165] My reading of the *History* is, to some extent, the opposite: Attaleiates carefully constructed a narrative that repeatedly argues for specific ethical principles – bravery, self-sacrifice, *philanthropia*, or respect to one's benefactors – and failure to do so leads to consequences, either through military defeat, a natural disaster, or a premature death. All these phenomena rise, for Attaleiates, from the same cosmic force, which is never blind to the morality of a ruler's actions.

4.2.3. Causality in Skylitzes' accounts after the death of Basil II

In his analysis of the historicity of the different middle-Byzantine sources, Kaldellis concluded by promoting the *Synopsis* as one of the best sources for factual historical information.[166] Kaldellis reached this verdict after having spotted several kinds of 'un-history', from

[162] *History* 277/213.29.30: ὅπου γὰρ Θεὸς τὸ θεραπευόμενον, ἅπαν ἕτερον ἐν δευτέρῳ ἐτίθετο.
[163] *History* 223-225/172.8-173.13.
[164] *History* 223-224/172.11-28 on Nikephoros Phokas; 313-314/240.12-241.12 for the case of the emperor Theodosios.
[165] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 171.
[166] A. Kaldellis, 'The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative Ontologies', in S. Marjanović-Dušanić (ed.), *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22-27 August 2016, Plenary Papers* (Belgrade 2016), 304.

classicising borrowings to outright praise of a character, which 'pose as factual accounts but shouldn't be treated as such in modern reconstructions'.[167] For Kaldellis, Skylitzes' account seems to escape from these 'filters': in opposition to other sources that allegedly 'embellish a tiny core of hard data',[168] Skylitzes seems to extract the embellishments and save the hard data. Furthermore, these data seems to be corroborated by non-Byzantine, contemporary narratives.[169] For the sake of debating historical causality, Kaldellis seems to distinguish between sources that, more or less discretely, chained events together in order to praise or discredit a character, and other stories that were more sober in pointing to smaller, technical errors as the cause for events. While Psellos consciously dismissed, according to Kaldellis, any information on military affairs during Constantine's reign after 1042 for the sake of criticising this ruler's policy, Kaldellis praised Skylitzes' 'coherent' account of Constantine IX.[170]

However, there are two problems with reading the *Synopsis* as an accurate or impartial historical account. Firstly, the *Synopsis* is largely based on edited earlier sources, very subtly at times. At least some of these now-lost sources did carry their own agendas and projected them by using a number of rhetorical skills that are now blurred in Skylitzes' account. One must wonder then how much we can rely in Skylitzes' apparent abundance of 'hard facts', even if these match some accounts produced outside Constantinople.[171] For example, Shepard noted that Skylitzes' account of Constantine IX possibly originated, for the most part, on Katakalon Kekaumenos' memoirs. Shepard also noted that Skylitzes remains silent on some military

[167] Kaldellis, 'Manufacture of History', 295.
[168] Kaldellis, 'Manufacture of History', 301, in reference to Leo the Deacon's treatment of military campaigns.
[169] Kaldellis, 'Manufacture of History', 304.
[170] Kaldellis, 'Manufacture of History', 304; see note 56 on page 97, chapter 3.
[171] C. Holmes, 'The Rhetorical Structures', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 187-200, here 189:

> In his preface Skylitzes portrays himself as the active architect of his narrative in full control of his underlying texts. However, when attention is turned to the main body of the narrative, his energetic introductory remarks appear, at least at first glance, to suffer an ignoble collapse …. Skylitzes transmits many episodes almost verbatim.

It must be noted, however, that Holmes later notes the many ways in which Skylitzes 'transcends the status of the copyist': Holmes, 'Rhetorical Structures', 190.

manoeuvres taking place during Constantine's reign, and explained these silences as following Kekaumenos' omissions from his memoirs.[172] That is not entirely different from Psellos' narrative techniques, as he also selected the pieces of information that best suited his aims. Moving forward to the *Continuation*, a narrative mostly based on two surviving sources – the *History* and to some extent the *Chronographia* – one can see how little Skylitzes needed to change from his sources in order to produce a different story; and yet, the focus and interests of the previous account largely remain in Skylitzes' new text.[173] Therefore, Kaldellis' defence of this source as especially detached from 'embellished gossip' works, at best, only when compared with other narratives whose partiality is more explicit, such as the *Chronographia* and the *History*. If the *Synopsis* seems more dispassionate and interested in actual factual detail it might be because the author took some previous sources and, just as the *Continuation* did with the *History*, stripped out the most dramatic, apparently 'un-historical' sections of the account, in order to create a new narrative with a different agenda, as we have seen.

Secondly, even when Skylitzes, and his sources, offer some data regarding, for example, the location or the date of some events, the explanations of historical causality as contained in the *Synopsis* are nevertheless based, sometimes quite explicitly, in the mainstream values of their time.[174] Even if some sections of the *Synopsis*, such as the account of Kekaumenos' campaigns, were based on the sincere testimony of direct participants on the events, they also collaborated to cement small anecdotal elements into a coherent narrative by adding extended moral axioms at the core of the story. A number of super-human events corresponded to the presentation of the political decisions taken by the eleventh century emperors, from floods to

[172] J. Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto: The Rhetoric of Katakalon Kekaumenos', in T. Shawcross and I. Toth (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine empire and beyond* (Cambridge 2018) 185-214.
[173] See pages 287-297, chapter 6, for the analysis of the depiction of Isaak Komnenos in the *Continuation*.
[174] For a similar approach, comparing Skylitzes' depiction of Basil I and Michael IV, see T. Sklavos, 'Moralising History: The *Synopsis Historiarum* of John Skylitzes', in J. Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006) 110-119, esp. 115-119 for Skylitzes' depiction of Michael.

the apparition of prophetic stars.[175] John Orphanotrophos is depicted as the subject of displeasing visions because of his role in the assassination of Romanos III, an emperor whose military defeat in Syria was also predicted through omens, Skylitzes informed us. Even further: major political events during the reign of Michael IV, such as foreign invasions and rebellions, are juxtaposed with mentions of the moral guilt of Orphanotrophos and the man he sat on the throne, Michael IV.[176]

Beyond the mention of acts of explicit divine providence in his account Skylitzes linked positive major political and military changes to the bravery, intuition, or austerity of the main characters – his moral explanation of historical causality is a central feature of the text. These traits are traceable to the values discussed in the section above: the drunken general, the sleeping army and the emotional eunuch are stepping away from the masculine ideal, and thus are punished by history.[177] Skylitzes' labour as an historian invariably connected individual morality to collective change.

[175] *Synopsis* 377.4-12, 385.52-386.64, 386.74-81 (concerning Romanos III), and 393.45-57 (Michael IV).
[176] *Synopsis* 377.26-378.34 (on the lament predicting the military defeat in Syria), 393.51-57 (the demonic possession of the emperor Michael IV, connected to fallen stars), 394.77-395.94 (visions of plagues linked to the sinful assassination of Romanos III), and 397.64-398.74 (Skylitzes criticises the emperor for not abdicating, which is followed by further invasions); Sklavos, 'Moralising History', 115 noted the moralising purpose in showing the correspondence between the sins of Michael IV and divine displeasure; see also A. Laiou, 'Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes', *DOP* 46 (1992), 171: 'if M IV had renounced to the empire, it would have been otherwise … these acid remarks seem to be editorial comments'.
[177] Some examples of stereotypes and their relation with historical causality have been mention earlier in this chapter, on pages 153-178; to add a further example, Skylitzes broadly explained serious Roman defeats in Sicily because of the commanders' lack of military order and discipline: *Synopsis* 383.97-384.10.

5. Spatial aspects of characterisation

In previous chapters I discussed characterisation in the accounts of Psellos, Attaleiates and Skylitzes regarding, among other elements, gender and age stereotypes in relation to the main characters, or the narrator's choice of specific gender rules. This chapter will show the role of spatial depiction in the representation of the rulers' character and deeds. This chapter constitutes the first comparison of the eleventh-century historical narratives from the point of view of spatial context.

Previous research paid attention to the spatial context, both geographical and human. However, researchers mostly regarded space as an objective context which conditions, if not determines, the lives of human communities. Much has been said about Constantinople as a space where an intellectual elite flourished, Psellos and Attaleiates among them. A world of ceremonies – both inside and outside the palace – roads populated with traders and workers of every kind, monastic foundations, markets, harbours and farms on the outskirts of the city, all of it encircled with impressive walls. Similarities, and especially differences, have been pointed out between the environment of the city and life in the provinces.[1]

Only recent studies have approached the Byzantine perception of space.[2] Space, though perhaps relatable to an objective reality, is objectified by the human gaze, and therefore perceived differently by diverse groups and individuals.[3] Returning to the division between the city and the provinces in eleventh-century Byzantium, the stress of some scholars has recently

[1] B. Krsmanović, *The Byzantine Province in Change: On the Threshold between the 10th and the 11th Century* (Athens 2008).
[2] L. Brubaker 'The Conquest of Space', in R. Macrides (ed.) *Travel in the Byzantine World: Papers from the Thirty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April* (Aldershot, 2002) 235-57 noted the different approaches to the landscape, depending on the position and purpose of the viewer; M. Lau, C. Franchi, and M. Di Rodi (eds.), *Landscapes of Power: Selected Papers from the XV Oxford University Byzantine Society International Graduate Conference* (Oxford 2014).
[3] In the case of the sources analysed, the relation between the space depicted and the narrator is even more indirect: the events narrated often occurred years ago, and the narrator might have not been present in the scene himself.

shifted from defining these spaces as we think they objectively were, to studying the ways the Byzantines labelled the life outside the city gates as dangerous. Margaret Mullett, for example, questioned assertions that 'the Byzantines did not like to travel', proposing instead an in-depth study of the literary and generic frames of the outside as the space 'where the unexpected was expected'.[4] Literary genres worked, not as imposed rules in order for an author's writing to be approved, but rather as the necessary frames that allow us to comprehend and communicate our impressions about the world. Following this approach into Byzantine perceptions of space, this chapter will explore spatial aspects of characterisation, by acknowledging that narrators, by describing a given scene's spatial context, are also bringing pre-existing spatial hierarchies forward, and are therefore telling us more about the characters situated in that scenario.[5]

Perhaps a suitable, small-scale example of my own approach to the spatial context can be made by studying Psellos' use of metaphors in the *Chronographia*. Conventional approaches to the matter moved between the traditional admiration for Psellos' art of writing, and the notion that the author is encoding his true message in the use of specific metaphors. In the 1920s, Emile Renaud defined Psellos' use of metaphors 'comme le plus beau et le plus fécond des tropes'.[6] More recently, John Duffy highlighted Psellos' use of metaphors related to salt and sweet water in a two-folded perspective: the metaphors were either 'used to convey a central component of Psellos' intellectual agenda (…) the opposition between pagan lore and Christian doctrine', or were 'another example of what one may call the inventiveness and versatility of Psellos as a writing artist'.[7] I instead suggest approaching Psellos' use of

[4] M. Mullett, 'Travel Genres and the Unexpected', in R. Macrides (ed.), *Travel in the Byzantine World: Papers from the Thirty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April 2000* (Aldershot 2002) 259-284; also Brubaker, 'The Conquest', 246.
[5] M. Veikou, ''Telling spaces' in Byzantium: Ekphraseis, Place-Making and 'Thick Description'', in C. Messis, M. Mullett, and I. Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018) 15-32; I.J.F. de Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford 2014) 114.
[6] E. Renaud, *Étude de la langue et du style de Michel Psellos* (Paris 1920) 478.
[7] Psellos' metaphors have been presented as a proof of the author's skills in the art of writing. Even more recently: J. Duffy, 'Bitter Brine and Sweet Fresh Water: the Anatomy of a Metaphor in Psellos', in C. Sode and S. Takács (eds.), *Novum Millenium: Studies on Byzantine History and culture dedicated to Paul Speck* (Aldershot 2001) 89.

metaphors as pieces of the complex intertextual web: as links between the story being told and some sharply different context that is also familiar to an intended audience. Metaphors recreate the symbolic order, a frame that makes an inconsistent reality look consistent.[8] Moreover, Psellos' use of metaphors gives a meaning to events that favour a number of institutions, groups, and individuals, Psellos being among them. Psellos does this through metaphors that recal other stories the audience has heard or read. Consider, for example, Psellos' depiction of the relationship between the young Basil II and his uncle, the *parakoimomenos* Basil:

> The *parakoimomenos*, in fact, was like an athlete competing at the games while Basil the emperor watched him as a spectator, not a spectator present merely to cheer on the victor, but rather one who trained himself in the running and took part in the contests himself, following in the other's footsteps and imitating his style.[9]

We do know that the daily life at the court exceeds the simplicity of this metaphor, as Psellos would know himself. However, he chose to synthesise the chaotic situation by equating it to chariot races, a scenario both the narrator and the intended audience would be familiar with. Further, referring to politics as chariot racing allows Psellos to bring a whole cosmos of values and concepts to the mind of his intended audience, ideas that invite them to consider politics under the guise of contests, competition, and the individual efforts of Olympic champions. A similar metaphor, referring to the emperor Botaneiates as an Olympic victor, enables Attaleiates to connect Botaneiates' famous military and philanthropic achievements with his supposed literary abilities.[10]

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[8] The contrast between the two approaches may been that between a study that stresses the existence of an easily apprehended reality outside the symbolic order (Plato's myth of the cave would illustrate this approach very well) and scepticism.

[9] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 1.3.16-19: καὶ ἦν ὁ μὲν παρακοιμώμενος, οἷον ἀθλητὴς καὶ ἀγωνιστὴς· ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος θεωρὸς, οὐχ ὅπως ἐκεῖνον στεφανώσειεν· ἀλλ' ὡς αὐτὸς δραμεῖται καὶ ἀγωνίσηται, κατ' ἴχνος ἐκείνῳ τὴν ἀγωνίαν τιθέμενος.

[10] Michael Attaleiates, *History*, 4/3.22-24. I discussed this affair in F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'A Narrative Approach on the Dedication of Michael Attaleiates' *History* to the Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates', in A. Theodoraki (ed.), *Πρακτικά 9ου Συνεδρίου Μεταπτυχιακών Φοιτητών και Υποψηφίων Διδακτόρων του Τμήματος Φιλολογίας. Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθήνων 4-7 Οκτωβρίου 2017: Βυζαντινή Φιλολογία* (Athens 2018) 62-85.

The virtue, and problem, of interpreting Psellos' use of metaphors is that each one of them frames the situation from a different point of view – and there are a plethora of them. For instance, Bernard showed Psellos' predilection for depicting politics and court life as an arena, because this metaphor reflected the author's self-consciousness of living in a competitive environment where individual, cunning effort mattered.[11] However, another group of metaphors make different points. Constantine IX's career is depicted as a journey across a stormy sea, the palace being his final resting place.[12] This metaphor bears some similarities with the former two: politics are viewed as the struggle of a man facing an uneasy task. Nonetheless the Olympic victor has to demonstrate his abilities to an exigent audience, while the captain of the boat fights against apparently-random elements for his own survival. Psellos depicts Constantine IX's negligent attitude to politics after reaching the throne as a man who survived a sea storm: the metaphor allows Psellos to transmit a balanced message, halfway between reproach and compassion for Constantine.[13] In opposition to this attitude Psellos describes Isaak I Komnenos as a man who, after facing one storm, immediately jumps into the sea again, to the amazement of the narrator and the audience alike.[14] Metaphors like these not only serve to colour the narrative and demonstrate the author's distinctive skills and knowledge; they shape the audience's expectations and swiftly move the story from one

[11] F. Bernard 'Authorial Practices and Competitive Performance in the Works of Michael Psellos', in Lauxtermann, M. D. and Whittow, M. (eds.), *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017), esp. 34 and 42; see also my discussion on Papaioannou's emphasis on Psellos' 'self-advertisement' on pages 52-55.

[12] *Chronographia* 6.34; McCartney noted Psellos' inclination to use nautical metaphors in his works and tried to link the narrator's preference to his biographical background: E. McCartney, 'The Use of Metaphor in Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*', in J. Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative: papers in honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006), 84-92.

[13] *Chronographia* 6.34, 72, and 179; see M. Trizio 'The Waves of Passions and Stillness of the Sea: Appropriating Neoplatonic Imagery and Concept Formation-Theory in Middle Byzantine Commentaries on Aristotle', in S. Mariev (ed.) *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism* (Boston, MA and Berlin 2017) 57-78; other common metaphorical allusions are the wheel of fortune and the emperor as sun, both of them not reflecting a fair competition but admission of natural, unmovable natural laws: L. Burgmann, 'A Law for Emperors: Observations on a Chrysobull of Nikephoros III Botaneiates', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992* (Aldershot 1994) 250.

[14] *Chronographia* 7.44.

scenario to the next, persuading the audience to follow the narrator's interpretation of the past. If we consider genre as 'far more liberating than constricting (…) a major component of the horizon of expectations of Byzantine literary society',[15] these metaphors transport the audience to different spaces and function as brief 'infusions' of different spaces and, quite frequently, different genres. They direct the audience's expectations here and there at the narrator's convenience.

The evocation of specific spaces plays a major role in this navigation through the narrative. Just like a stormy seascape or a crowded hippodrome, every space has the potential to evoke ideas that are common to both narrator and audience. We must study them closely, since the allusions are sometimes far from apparent to modern readers, as they are encoded in a Byzantine context for a Byzantine audience. This chapter is divided in three sections. Firstly, I will discuss the Byzantine approach to the inside and outside, which is a persistent division of space in the sources, and entails some degree of moralisation of the characters and their actions. Afterwards I will discuss the multifaceted role of the sacred space, and conclude with the human body conceived, and used in the narrative, as a space in itself.

5.1. Inside and outside, the City and the frontier

The depiction of space in the sources is far from constituting a neutral depiction of reality. It is instead traversed by all kinds of cultural touchstones and genre rules. Until recently, scholars focused on the informative utility of spatial contexts provided in the sources. Defining where events occurred offers valuable information about past events that, otherwise, would end up falling into oblivion. However, the narrator's interest in depicting the space around the action

[15] Mullett. 'Madness of Genre', 243; for the first part of the quote, Mullett quoted Derrida: J. Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) 55-81.

may have other uses within the narrative. To begin with, it can also help the narrator frame his account and organise it internally. Attaleiates, for example, divides some sections of his chronicle between an eastern scenario, marked by the eruption of the Seljuk Turks but also the later rebellion of Botaneiates, and then a western plot marked by the raids of Pechenegs and Cumans, plus the bursts of several rebellions.[16]

Other layers of meaning might be embedded in the accounts' descriptions of the landscape. Mentioning a character's capacity to work day and night,[17] to campaign all year round – as in the case of Psellos' representation of Basil II –[18] or dealing with both eastern and western affairs simultaneously[19] also evokes the idea of a flawless character, who is ready to face every problem at once. By mentioning that the Turkish attack on Romanos' army in 1069 was stopped only due to the difficult geography of Mount Taurus (ὁ Ταῦρος τὸ ὄρος),[20]Attaleiates is underlining the extreme situation of the troops at that time, protected only by the environment itself and the charisma of Emperor Romanos. The only defence against enemy hordes were the mountains, more of a natural obstacle than the result of human preparation.

Attaleiates is also interested in fitting geographical digressions into his account.[21] These digressions seem to split the flow of the narrative: in the case of the description of the regions around the columns of Herakles, the narration contains 242 words describing the geographical

[16] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Attaleiates*, xliv. Similar elements can be found in the recording of the time when the events took place: they do not only provide information, but help to frame the account, and offer to the audience the impression of a well-informed narrator; this east/west division of the narrative can be found in other Byzantine accounts, such as the *History* of George Akropolites: R. Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford 2007) 34-35.
[17] *History* 4/4.2-8; 312/239.19 for Botaneiates' tireless work, day and night; *Chronographia* 4.12.17-18 concerning John Orphanotrophos; and 4.44 concerning his brother Michael IV. Centuries earlier, Procopius used Justinian's lack of sleep to subvert his figure, explaining the emperor's capacity as demoniac: L. Brubaker, 'Sex, Lies and Textuality: The *Secret History* of Prokopios and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium', in L. Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith (eds.) *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge 2004) 83-101.
[18] *Chronographia* 1.32.5.
[19] *Chronographia* 4.4.
[20] *History* 134-125/105.11-17.
[21] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xlvii-liv.

and social conditions of these lands.[22] These passages add variety to the account, so they would be pleasing to the audience. They also allow Attaleiates to present himself as familiar with the Classical texts.[23]

The space is often organised in binaries, showing a preference for one space over another. As Mikhail Bakhtin remarked, the representation of space and time become inevitably interconnected in the narrative: a benign or joyful scene may be represented at daylight, in opposition to the fearful night;[24] the east (the land where the sun rises) prevails over west, and summer rises victoriously over the depths of winter.[25] The first element in a binary hierarchy tends to be placed above all others, or in the centre of a shape as opposed to the periphery.[26]

The centre and the periphery, the distinction between inside and outside, is one of the most frequent spatial binaries in our accounts. The former usually corresponds to Constantinople, another urban centre, or sometimes the Roman Empire as a whole. Meanwhile the outside, set in opposition to the inside, usually corresponds to either the frontiers, χώρα or ἄκρα, lands dominated by foreign powers, or even the space beyond the city walls or the limits of the military camp. In sum, there are constantly shifting notions of centre and periphery. This distinction goes beyond a mere classification between two elements perceived as different from each other. It organises the space hierarchically, and thus, contributes to the mental preconceptions embedded in the narrative.[27] Placing a given character in one of these two

[22] *History* 220-222/170.12-171-5; other examples would be the digression on the causes of earthquakes in 88-89/70.19-71.14; or the earlier, rather unexpected mention to the river Ganges in 43-44/35.19-21.
[23] N.S.M. Matheou, 'City and Sovereignty in East Roman Thought, c. 1000-1200: Ioannes Zonaras' Historical Vision of the Roman State', in N.S.M. Matheou, T. Kampianaki, and L.M. Bondioli (eds.), *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2016) 62-63.
[24] *Chronographia* 7.38-42; M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Information* (trans. C. Emerson and M. Holmquist) (Austin, TX 1981 [1975]); in the field of Byzantine studies, see Veikou, ''Telling spaces' in Byzantium', 15-32.
[25] *History* 215/165.25-166.3; 242/186.20-26.
[26] *Chronographia* 4.18, 6.3, and 7.22-25.
[27] De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 114.

spaces tells the audience how they match with the supposed ideal type expected of them, and can be explicitly related to the outcome of major events.

Few passages show the symbolic power of the frontiers' inhabitants better than Skylitzes' depiction of the displeased eastern commanders on their embassy to Emperor Michael VI. The commanders arrived at the capital after hearing about the generosity of the ruler. It turns out, however, that the emperor would not be generous with them, as (according to Skylitzes) he was controlled by the eunuchs and other court members.[28] The commanders argued that they should not be 'treated with disdain like everyone else':

> It was unjust for citizens who had never manned the battlements nor contended in battle to attain imperial honours while they, who from their youth up had been waging war and standing guard duty by night so that the others could sleep soundly, should be passed over and deprived of the imperial largesse.[29]

Coming from outside the capital, the commanders can articulate the legitimacy of their claims based on moral superiority: they live in constant danger. Furthermore, they claim that their exposure to the perils of the east benefit others.

The division between outside and inside in political speech is grounded in a number of premises The outside is, by default, a chaotic, dangerous, and to some extent disregarded area. Outside the city walls, less control on human activities could be expected, along with exposure to a number of forces of nature. Travelling exposed a person to beasts, bandits, or drowning in a shipwreck. Additionally, people outside the walls of Constantinople, or outside any proper fortification, would be much more exposed to barbarian or bandit raids. Bryennios' *Material for History* depicts Alexios' movements within the Anatolia of the 1070s as a continuous hide-

[28] John Skylitzes, *Synopsis* 480.31-40.

[29] *Synopsis* 486.6-10: τελευταῖον δ' ἐπαγαγόντες μὴ ἄξιον εἶναι τοὺς μὲν πολίτας τῶν βασιλικῶν μὴ ἀμοιρῆσαι τιμῶν, μήτε παρ' ἔπαλξιν στάντας, μήτε πρὸς πολεμίους διαγωνισαμένους ποτέ, αὐτοὺς δὲ τοὺς ἐκ παίδων προπολεμοῦντας καὶ ἀγρυπνοῦντας, ἵν' ἀδεῶς οὗτοι καθεύδοιεν, παροραθῆναι καὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς φιλοτιμίας διεκπεσεῖν.

and-seek, in which the peril of being spotted by a band of Turkish raiders is constant.[30] For people from the inner circles of the imperial administration, exile was a dreadful event, combining the loss of former privileges with a new position of uncertainty, perhaps a punishment only preferable to mutilation or execution.[31]

The outside, when evoked as such, often possesses an inferior status to the inside.[32] However, the narrators assume that the wild landscape must be tamed by imperial forces. Disregarding the control of the provinces would be utterly unsustainable for the centre. Not only that: an equally inherent section of the empire would be lost, and the establishment headed by the emperor would be neglecting the fulfilment of a basic task. Shame and poverty would follow such a neglect. The climax of the tyranny of Michael VII Doukas, as recounted by the *History*, shows the bonds that are assumed between centre and periphery. Although Michael is still strong in Constantinople, the weakening of his army outside the city walls provokes famine inside the capital, followed by the birth of deformed creatures. Furthermore, Attaleiates recounted the rise of political instability in the Balkans, by blaming the rebellions of Bryennios and Botaneiates, which in turn provoked the movement of provincial inhabitants to the safety of Constantinople.[33]

The outside, although presented as a lower, undesirable place to be, must be dominated and tamed. The task is not enjoyable, but it is necessary. Therefore, the work of the individual

[30] *Material for History*, 2.9, for example, depicts Alexios being taken by surprise while resting at a friend's house in the countryside; in 2.26, Alexios is even incapable to stay for a while in Kastamon, time ago the Komnenian family castle, for the Turks may attack them at any moment.
[31] Examples of dreadful exiles can be found in *Chronographia* 1.19-22 (Basil the *Parakoimomenos*) 5.14 (John Orphanotrophos) 5.22-23 (Zoe P*orphyrogenneta*); *History* 63-66/50.10-53.4 (patriarch Keroularios); Attaleiates stated the preferability of exile over other corporal punishments in 309/237.9-17; on exile, see H. Evert-Kappesowa, *Formy zesłania w państwie bizantyńskim*, in in C. Mango, O. Prìcak, and U.M. Pasicznyk (eds.), *Okeanos. Essays Presented to Ihor Sevcenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students* (Cambridge, MA 1983) 166–73; B.P. Maleon, 'Some Notes on the Clerical Exile in the Byzantine Empire, Since the End of Antique World to the Macedonian Ascension', *Classica et Christiana* 5.2 (2010) 351-367.
[32] For instance, *Chronographia* 6.29 represents the people in the provinces as having little conception of the government; A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, NY and Oxford 2017) 278-279 summarised how 'Asia Minor passed from the oblivion of peace to oblivion of foreign occupation'.
[33] *History* 211/162.31-163.2.

who ensures the survival of the established order by exposing himself (or, rarely, herself) to the dangers of the outside, sometimes 'descending' to the periphery from Constantinople itself, is a person worthy of praise, provided that the task is accomplished effectively. In our narratives, not only are these individuals almost always male, but the narrator will rush to explain some disaster by presenting the characters in charge as some sort of 'model person' in whom inhabits the collective culture and is characterised by their deviation from the masculine ideal, as was the case of eunuchs and ecclesiastics in charge of armies. Thus, these characters are often expected to fail in their endeavour, or to embody the subversive tone of a scene, from the very moment that they are presented.[34]

Few are the cases of a woman showing the capacity to overcome the dangers of the frontier by herself in the four accounts studied. One of the exceptions is the case of the woman who was attacked by a Varangian in the theme of Thrakesion in his attempt to rape her; she managed to defend herself by killing her attacker. The comrades of the deceased Varangian reacted by offering the woman the latter's wealth.[35] In the times when the empire lacked an emperor, empresses were not asked to engage with the affairs of the frontier directly but, at best, direct them from the palace, and perhaps marry a male ruler who would fulfil the task.[36]

In the historical accounts of Psellos, Attaleiates, and Skylitzes, the opposition between frontier and capital constitutes a hallmark in the definition of some rulers. Attaleiates began his encomiastic depiction of Romanos IV by praising his dedication to the external wars against

[34] On 'model person', see D. Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln, NE 2002) 127; *History* 32/26.19-20 presented a eunuch-priest ahead of an ultimately defeated army in the wars against the Pechenegs; *History* 33-35/27.23-28.20 explains the defeat of another Roman army because its leader, the eunuch Constantine the Praipositos, did not pay attention to the wise advice of the *magistros* Arrianites; *History* 35-36.29.6-19 showed the Roman forces again on the lead, thanks to the leadership of a brave Latin, yet in *History* 37/30.21-24 and 38/31.6-18 Attaleiates depicts a 'deceitful' and 'resentful' (φθόνῳ καὶ δόλῳ) monk-eunuch again in charge, which leads to a major defeat against the Pechenegs; the *Synopsis* 381.27-34 portrayed an eunuch acting irrationally in the battlefield, as a further element of subversion.
[35] *Synopsis* 394.70-77.
[36] This is most importantly the case of empress Eudokia's sole reign, which was contemporary to important Seljuk raids: *Chronographia* 7c.1-9; *History* 92-101/73.14-80.12.

the Seljuk menace.[37] Attaleiates repeatedly offers evidence of Romanos' championing of the Roman cause. He depicted Romanos IV during his first eastern campaign as preventing his army from approaching Antioch, so the troops would not disrupt the life of the city. Instead, Romanos chose a more hazardous path through the desert.[38] Later in the narrative, when Romanos is about to be blinded, Attaleiates addressed Emperor Michael as if he were directly conversing with him at the moment when he decides to blind Romanos:

> What do you have to say, O emperor, you and those who crafted this unholy decision along with you? The eyes of a man who had done no wrong but risked his life for the welfare of the Romans and who had fought with a powerful army against the most warlike nations when he could have waited it all out in the palace without any danger and shrugged off the toils and horrors of the military life?[39]

Later sections of Attaleiates' digression highlight Romanos' renunciation of power as another proof of restraint:

> He lay there half dead, as he had already been weakened by his illness, bidding farewell to arms, for such was the reward that he had received for his earlier imperial splendour and glory that reached to the heavens, or rather for doing noble deeds on behalf of the Romans.[40]

The frontier is not a suitable space for everyone. A given character's survival underlines, not his adulthood, but his definition as an exceptional character: the sort of individual who should rule the empire. In the *Chronographia*, the frontier lands play a role in the process of a character's definition quite similar to the *History*. Basil II undergoes a considerable change in his character after he faces the menace coming from outside the palace, namely the rebellions of Skleros and Phokas:

> The complete change in his mode of living dates from the attempted revolutions of the notorious Skleros and of Phocas …. From that time onward, Basil's carefree

[37] *History* 102/81.7-10.
[38] *History* 119-120/94.7-24.
[39] *History* 176/136.1-6: Τί φῄς, ὦ βασιλεῦ, καὶ οἱ σὺν σοὶ τὴν ἀνοσίαν βουλὴν κατασκευασάμενοι; Ἀνδρὸς ὀφθαλμοὺς μηδὲν ἀδικήσαντος ἀλλὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν θέντος ὑπὲρ πάσης τῆς Ῥωμαίων εὐετηρίας καὶ τοῖς πολεμικωτάτοις ἔθνεσιν ἀντιταξαμένου μετὰ καρτεροῦ τοῦ συντάγματος, ἐξὸν ὃν αὐτῷ ἀκινδύνως τοῖς βασιλείοις προσμένειν καὶ στρατιωτικοὺς πόνους καὶ φόβους ἀποτινάσσεσθαι;
[40] *History* 178-179/138.10-14: ἡμιθνὴς ἔκειτο, προκατειργασμένος μὲν καὶ τῇ νόσῳ, τότε δὲ τοῖς ὅπλοις ἀπαγορεύων καὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς ἐκείνης λαμπρότητος καὶ τῆς μέχρις οὐρανοῦ φθανούσης δόξης, μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς ὑπὲρ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀνδραγαθίας τοιαῦτα κομισάμενος τὰ ἐπίχειρα.

> existence (τρυφῆς) was forgotten and he wholeheartedly applied himself to the difficult matters (σπουδῆς).[41]

Earlier in the account, Basil 'survived' the frontier, namely the rebellion of Skleros and Phokas, for reasons such as his recently-acquired sobriety: he caught his rivals off-guard, drinking.[42] Basil is later applauded because of his care of the frontiers, a decision that implied his lack of enjoyment of the wealth his campaigns procured to the empire.[43] In contrast, Romanos III did not pass the test of the frontier. In the *Chronographia*, the depiction of this ruler is, from the very beginning, one of a man who believes himself able to outshine previous emperors. Psellos constantly reminds us that he is wrong, but it is the lengthy narration of Romanos' disastrous campaign in Syria that finally shows the character's true colours. Romanos took the test, and it became clear that his pretentious aspirations were nothing more. Contrarily, the binary between internal and external is manifested in Romanos' successor Michael IV. He is praised by Psellos as a man who advances. He fights the Bulgarian rebellion while an illness is devouring his body. Psellos presents Michael's campaign as a victory, first in overcoming his own illness and the reluctance of his inner circle to allow him on campaign, and later in campaigning against the rebels themselves.[44]

But what happened when emperors did not visit the frontier? Narrators might note emperors' neglect of their duties. That was the situation of young Basil II according to Psellos: 'His main concern was with his banqueting and his life was spent in the jolly, indolent atmosphere of the court'.[45] Constantine IX is reproached for his lack of engagement with the enemy in all three accounts.[46] Skylitzes linked Constantine's affair with Maria Skleraina, a member of a family which rivalled Georgios Maniakes', to the latter's decision to rebel, thus

[41] *Chronographia* 1.4.12-15: ἀφ' οὗ δὲ ὁ Σκληρὸς ἐκεῖνος· καὶ ὁ μετ' ἐκεῖνον Φωκᾶς· καὶ αὖθις ὁ πρῶτος τρίτος ἐγεγόνει καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ βασιλειᾶν ἤρξαντο· καὶ ἐξ ἑκατέρων αὐτῷ τῶν μερῶν ἀντανέστησαν, ὅλοις ἱστίοις ἀπενεχθεὶς τῆς τρυφῆς, ὅλῳ πνεύματι ἀντείχετο τῆς σπουδῆς.
[42] *Chronographia* 1.13.
[43] *Chronographia* 1.31.
[44] *Chronographia* 4.43.
[45] *Chronographia* 1.4.
[46] *Chronographia* 6.34; *History* 35/28.21-29.6.

showing the relation between Constantine's flawed practices in the capital, his personal affairs, and the situation in the frontier.[47] Even though an emperor may refrain from campaigning, he is still responsible for the situation.

Another kind of characterisation of a subversive individual, especially frequent in the *History*, is that of the egotistical character who undermines the ideal order from the inside. This disruption can be motivated by the characters' personal interests, or out of their incapacity to control their emotions. When the troops of the rebel Nikephoros Bryennios reach the outskirts of Constantinople, their destruction of the extramural properties is viewed as a marker of their illegitimacy.[48] Bryennios' actions are represented as the opposite to what Romanos aimed to achieve when he avoided Antioch in his campaign (exposing Roman cities and citizens to the troops).[49] Similar to his earlier narration of the revolt of Leo Tornikes, Attaleiates represented Bryennios unleashing the outside, namely military violence and destruction, right at the gates of Constantinople.[50] Contrary to Bryennios' disaster, Attaleiates defines Botaneiates' rebellion as bloodless. This happens on two occasions, firstly by the narrator's own mouth, and secondly by Botaneiates himself, when he lectures a captured Nikephoros Bryennios: 'Everything was accomplished without bloodshed or destruction, without even so much as a nosebleed, which is a definitive and fitting sign of his faith in God and of his appointment by him'.[51]

Botaneiates and Bryennios were carrying out parallel rebellions against Michael VII Doukas, who remained in the capital. Michael not only exposed his subjects to increasing chaos due to his incapacity to rule, he even sends his wife and children to parley with an enemy outside the city. His action is understood as a flagrant neglect of his family duties, and a further

[47] *Synopsis* 427.57-428.71; see also *Chronographia* 6.34 and page 88 above.
[48] *History* 252/193.22-194.14.
[49] See above in page 195.
[50] *History* 23-24/19.17-25.
[51] *History* 271/208.21-24: ἀναίμακτον ἅπαν καὶ ἀνώλεθρον συνεπεράνθη τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα, ὡς μηδὲ ῥῖνα τινὸς αἵματος γενέσθαι διάβροχον, ὅπερ δεῖγμα τῆς εἰς Θεὸν αὐτοῦ πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐκ Θεοῦ προχειρίσεως τούτου σαφέστατόν τε καὶ οἰκειότατον.

expression of the character's passivity and cowardice.[52] Another element for characterising a subversive character is his preference for foreigners. Romanos IV Diogenes, though praised in earlier and later parts of the *History*, is described as increasingly distant from the imperial ideal as the narration of his reign continues: he hopes to finish the campaigning early, show excessive deference for a Turkish official who joined him in Constantinople after confronting the sultan Alp Arslan, and even prefers to move with his army to more benign valleys and a comfortable town accommodation in order to rest.[53]

The traits of laziness, egocentrism and *philobarbaros* implicitly apply to Romanos in Attaleiates' narration.[54] He has gradually abandoned the imperial ideal, and thus suffers divine punishment at Manzikert. Even though Attaleiates praised Romanos' sacrifice, and uses it to blame his imperial successor, he offered the aforementioned clues as explanations of the God-inspired defeat. The fire in the town where Romanos rested demonstrates Attaleiates' moralising thought, manifested in the landscape leading to different signals of divine discomfort.[55] If the signs are neglected, as they were, the disaster strikes. The defeat at Manzikert was that disaster.[56]

Praising frontier defenders, as Psellos put it,[57] by presenting them as characters outside the comfortable centre who deal with 'real' problems, may sound appealing to a modern audience. Scholars have sometimes believed the idea promoted by the sources that the

[52] *History* 189/146.2-4.
[53] For instance: *History* 127-131/100.7-102.22 on a first attempt by Romanos to end his campaign early and return to Constantinople; Attaleiates convinced Romanos to continue his campaign, but the emperor finally decided to break his promise in 132-133/103.3-26; the army was frightened by the Turks, because Romanos was not with them, and even Romanos IV seemed scared by the enemy: 134/104.19-105-11.
[54] See a broader discussion on this topic on pages 278-287.
[55] *History* 145/112.21-113.6; see also D. Krallis, 'The Army that Crossed Two Frontiers and Established a Third. The Uses of the Frontier in an Eleventh-Century Author (and some Implications on Modern Scholarship)', in O. Merisalo (ed.), *Frontiers in the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the Third European Congress of the Medieval Studies (Jyväskylä, 10-14 June 2003)* (Louvain-la-Neuve 2006) 335-348.
[56] Attaleiates explicitly addressed the key political troubles from his own time as a matter of correctly interpreting ominous signals and acting according to the divine will: see above on page 180.
[57] *Chronographia* 1.4.

emperor's contact with the frontier revealed some deeper truth about the imperial character, or about the situation of the empire overall. This has to do with the accounts' defence of this value, but also on our own modern approach to the frontier as a space for 'real' problems. Post-war scholarship was more verbal on this aspect. For Romilly Jenkins, the policies of 'blindness and folly' followed by the successors of Basil II were mostly rooted in the anti-militarism of the population in Constantinople.[58] Jenkins' profoundly utilitarian, and naturalised view of an anti-militaristic theory, and the practical necessity of war were deeply rooted in his immediate context.[59] However, it is easy to track back Jenkins' reading of the Byzantine eleventh century based, for example, on Attaleiates' contempt for the Roman soldiers:

> We rabidly fight against one another, our own countrymen, without restraint, showing contempt to death, but when it comes to wars with foreigners we are cowardly and unmanly, and appear to turn our backs to the enemy even before the battle begins.[60]

Much like the authors of the Byzantine historical narratives, Jenkins points at 'weak emperors' and 'inefficient commanders' as causes of political disaster, and adds some mostly modern contempt for the 'glittering but meaningless edifices of euphuism' that occupied the life of the civil elites.[61] In a few words, Jenkins assumed that wars and frontiers, statesmen and their worldviews, were substantially similar across time and space. Therefore, he followed when convenient, the Byzantine authors' moralising statements concerning the frontier, and filled the

[58] Jenkins was developing an intriguing variety of the older and more widespread discourse that depicted eleventh-century Byzantine politics as a clash between civil and military elites; see R. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD 610-1071* (London 1966) 335-336:

> This anti-military prejudice in the very heart of an empire which could only survive by means of continual warfare is a paradox … There was assuredly much in the concept of pacifism which commands respect. But in all Byzantine theories of life and government, there was a profound cleavage between faith and fact. The plain truth is that the empire could not afford such indulgence in theory. And when, through their predominant influence in Constantinople, the anti-military forced one after another of their representatives into power, and then set about oppressing and destroying the military organs of the empire … they could not see that their policies, however much justified in theory, were ruinous and fatal.

[59] I. Wood, 'Barbarians, Historians, and the Construction of National Identities', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1.1 (2008), 61-81.

[60] *History* 198/153.4-7: ὅτι κατ' ἀλλήλων λυττῶντες καὶ ἀκρατῶς τοῖς ὁμοφύλοις μαχόμενοι καὶ θανάτου καταφρονοῦντες, ἐν τοῖς ἀλλοφύλοις πολέμοις δειλοὶ καὶ ἀνάλκιδες καὶ πρὸ πολέμου νῶτα διδοῦντες φαινόμεθα.

[61] Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 334.

blanks with his own, modern views when the Byzantine sources seemed confusing, if not rhetorical. For Jenkins, Romanos III's campaign in Syria showed the emperor's delusion, just as Psellos said; but for Jenkins, Romanos' delusion had to do with a lack of empirical knowledge of the technicalities of war, a point more related to modern approaches to warfare than with Psellos' attitude in the *Chronographia*.[62]

Other scholars followed Jenkins in taking the sources for granted in their approach to the Byzantine frontier, filling gaps with modern assumptions. Ostrogorsky's *History of the Byzantine State*, albeit declaring that emperors and their deeds were 'merely the exponents of vigorous and irresistible social and economic forces', nevertheless assigns turning points in the empire's history as a result of the characters' engagements with the deepest problems, namely 'foreign policy'. Ostrogorsky summarised the 'disastrous tragedy' following Manzikert in the contrast between two men and two attitudes to the frontier:

> As counterpart of the powerful Turkish sultan, there sat on the imperial throne in Constantinople Psellos' pitiful puppet, a cloistered bookworm, prematurely worn out intellectually and physically, surrounded by court intriguers and long-winded pedants.[63]

Ostrogorsky defines the emperor Michael by his position in the capital, understood as negligent, while Anatolia is being invaded. Michael's presentation as a 'bookworm' is not flattering, since the books Michael is reading, Ostrogorsky assumes, do not help him reach an intellectual maturity, not to speak of his expected manliness and martial abilities. This depiction is close to Jenkins' 'glittering' court. It comprises a selection of the sources with whose values a modern reader would be sympathetic. Ostrogorsky effectively decontextualises the accounts, adding some modern moralising about the Byzantine past, and naturalising the resulting argumentation as the truth of the issue, accessible to both Byzantine and modern intelligent observers.

[62] Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 340.
[63] G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*; trans. J. Hussey (Oxford 1968 [1956]) 345.

More recent scholarship, although prone to contextualise the author's information more deeply, often take the Byzantine author's words quite literally. Anthony Kaldellis' recent monograph often gives much credit to the information provided in the *Chronographia*. The argument seems to be that Psellos was both extremely intelligent and close to the events or the protagonists, therefore his account and arguments must be more accurate than other contemporary sources. Just like previous scholars, Kaldellis follows Psellos in presenting Romanos III's campaign as delusional and badly prepared, and the emperor's defeat as a logical conclusion to an ill-prepared strategy.[64] But Kaldellis, Jenkins and Ostrogorsky all avoid being very explicit about what exactly went wrong in the campaign of Romanos III Argyros. The reason is that Psellos, the main source, keeps silent on this affair because it is not his primary purpose, which was to present Romanos as a delusional character, and to link this aspect of his *ethos* to the empire's inner and outer situation.[65]

There are at least three elements a modern reader should remember in order to keep some degree of scepticism about the Byzantine authors' approach to the frontier. Firstly, the idea that the emperor should personally engage with the frontier is not the only possibility in Byzantine political discourse. An emperor who refused to lead his troops to battle was not condemned to be unequivocally labelled as a 'cloistered bookworm', or to have his manliness questioned.[66] Psellos expressed this line of thought when narrating the capture of Romanos Diogenes: the emperor acted boldly, but should have protected himself from the enemies nevertheless.[67]

Secondly, it was largely the Byzantine narrator's prerogative to frame a given episode as happening in a dangerous external scenario. Let us consider Isaak's rebellion against Michael

[64] Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*, 160-163; *Chronographia* 7.11.
[65] See above on pages 83-88.
[66] Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 345 a propos de Michael VII; alternative approaches to the relation between the emperor and the frontier can be found in S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886-912): Politics and People* (Leiden, New York, NY, and Köln 1997) 164-193.
[67] *Chronographia* 7b.21.

VI: each of our accounts uses the conventions of frontier tropes differently to frame the event. Skylitzes frames the whole episode as an adventure. Other rebels failed in their task: a relative of the previous emperor Constantine Monomachos rebelled but had no support.[68] A commander named Frankopoulos trusted the hospitality of the Arab rulers in the town of Chliat and was captured.[69] Nikephoros Bryennios lost his patience towards some imperial representatives and acted without thinking, so he was captured and blinded by them.[70] In contrast, Isaak, Kekaumenos and their men triumphed in their rebellion due to their superior capacity. The stress is in their ability, put to test in a legitimate fight against tyranny.[71] The empire is depicted as an insecure land controlled by the tyrant Michael VI: a sort of frontier to be purified. Only because the conflict is framed in these terms, can the narrator portray Isaak's coup as legitimate.[72]

The opposite view prevails in Attaleiates' *History*. Krallis' analysis of the *History* underlines the presence of some apparently cynical passages where the narrator seemingly supports committing several atrocities as if for the greater good, which included balancing the empire's economy, ensuring long-term protection of the borders, and finally fostering prosperity. This led Krallis to conclude that, had he been able to continue his *History* and speak frankly, Attaleiates would have applauded Alexios Komnenos' ransacking of Constantinople. 'One moment of calculated cruelty ensured a century of Komnenian rule and restoration of the state'.[73] I suggest Attaleiates' thoughts are less structured and more situational: he definitely condemns Isaak Komnenos, Alexios' uncle, in his pursuit of victory through civil war. Not only does Attaleiates ignore Isaak's motivations or their potential legitimacy, but he uses space

[68] *Synopsis* 481.1-482.78.
[69] *Synopsis* 484.41-486.95.
[70] *Synopsis* 487.34-488.63.
[71] *Synopsis* 489.79-492.68.
[72] Skylitzes' coverage of the upraise against the emperor Michael VI has been already discussed on pages 134-144.
[73] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012) 229.

in a completely different way from Skylitzes. In Attaleiates' depiction of Isaak's campaign, there is neither a dangerous outside, nor a legitimate battlefield, as Skylitzes describes. The decisive battle near Nikaia, as discussed previously, is presented as a dishonourable slaughter.[74]

The difference between the narrations of Attaleiates and Skylitzes shows how authors had some degree of autonomy in conjuring the spatial context, and through this, in framing the characters' actions within one or another code of behaviour: the rebels' violence was legitimate for Skylitzes, but shameful for Attaleiates. Krallis' assumption that Attaleiates' sincere thoughts did not condemn actions such as Isaak's is not apparent in the narrative.

Describing the embassy sent to Isaak I Komnenos during the civil war, Psellos was able to depict himself as taking a huge risk, both because of the difficult trip to Isaak's camp, and because of the rebel soldiers' ferocity. However, the trip only involved sailing across the Marmara. Outside the city walls, the danger of being harmed as an ambassador was low, and remained purely hypothetical throughout the account, and yet Psellos depicts it as a nearly certain possibility, which he confronted bravely:

> [Some soldiers] wishing to intimidate me, begged the emperor 'to save the orator, who is sure to be destroyed out of hand, for most of the soldiers have already drawn their swords against him, and they will cut him in pieces the moment he leaves the tent!' I smiled at these words. 'If I, who have brought to you an Empire and all the power which you have achieved, am in recompense for these good tidings to be torn in pieces by your own hands, surely you are merely confirming the fact of your rebellion … I will neither change my opinions nor alter my words'.[75]

Nevertheless, Psellos' exposure to risk proves his loyalty to the old regime of Michael VI, contrary to what Skylitzes, and possibly Psellos' enemies, suggested.[76] Psellos was also able to make the opposite point in his account. In his depiction of Romanos IV, he criticised the

[74] *History* 55/44.17-23; see above on page 103.
[75] *Chronographia* 7.31.10-19: τῶν δὲ περὶ αὐτὸν ἔνιοι, διασεῖσαί μοι βουλόμενοι τὴν ψυχήν, «ἀλλ' ὦ βασιλεῦ» ἔφησεν· «σὺ δὲ ἀπολούμενον αὐτίκα σῶσον τὸν ῥήτορα. ἐσπάσαντο γὰρ οἱ πλείους ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ξίφος· καὶ ἐξιόντα, διασπαράξουσιν.» ἐμειδίασα τοῦτον ἀκούσας τὸν λόγον· καὶ «εἰ βασιλείαν» ἔφην «διακομίσας ὑμῖν· δυναστείαν τε ὁπόσην παραλαβόντες ἐσχήκατε, ἀντὶ τουτωνὶ τῶν εὐαγγελίων ταῖς ὑμετέραις χερσὶ σπαραχθήσομαι, ἆρ' οὐ βεβαιοῦτε τὴν τυραννίδα .... ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδὲν ἀλλοιότερον, ἢ ἐνθυμηθήσομαι ἢ φθέγξομαι.»
[76] *Synopsis* 497.11-17.

emperor's boldness in the battlefield, since that not only failed to signal Romanos' manliness and capacity to expose himself to danger on behalf of the empire, but instead was rooted in his greed and tyrannical ambitions.[77]

All in all, it becomes clear that Byzantine authors were able to play with the spatial elements in creative ways, adding or removing the 'frontier hero' element from a given character's list of achievements, as it suited them.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the 'truer values' that arise from characters' exposure to the frontier are substantially different, not only in secondary literature, but between the accounts themselves. Let us return to Romanos III's failed campaign in Syria, as narrated in the *Chronographia.* I previously discussed how the account shows Romanos' true colours, namely his lack of civil and military experience. But what does that experience consist of for Psellos? Psellos discusses some of the elements of a proper military knowledge, much later in the account, when narrating Romanos IV Diogenes's campaigns in Anatolia: 'everything pertaining to military formations, the building of war-machines, the capture of cities, and all the other things that a general has to consider'.[78] Jenkins interpreted Psellos' criticism of Romanos III as a lack of military practice in the latter's curriculum, again assuming that Psellos' approach to the frontier affairs is, due to his intelligence, just like a modern, mainstream approach.[79]

However, none of these practical elements occupies much space in Psellos' depiction of Romanos III's campaign, or of any battles and sieges in the *Chronographia*. According to Psellos, Romanos' first and foremost defect is his preference of quantity over quality: 'He

[77] *Chronographia* 7b.11; Attaleiates' markedly different approach can be found in *History* 176/136.2-6, where he explicitly praises Romanos for his decision to confront the enemy.
[78] *Chronographia* 7b.16.4-6: ὡς δέ με εἶδε τὴν τακτικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἠκριβωκότα, καὶ ὅσα περὶ λόχους καὶ τάξεις· καὶ ὅσα περὶ μηχανημάτων κατασκευὰς καὶ ἁλώσεις πόλεων· καὶ τἄλλα ὅσα στρατηγικῶν εἰσι διατάξεων, ἐθαύμασε μὲν.
[79] Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries,* 340 'though he [Romanos III] had never seen an engagement, he convinced himself he was a divinely gifted strategist'. Kaldellis also follows Psellos: *Streams of Gold*, 158-161.

[Romanos III] thought that if he increased the army beyond its normal strength, or rather, if the legion was made more numerous, when he came upon the foe with such masses of troops, Romans and allied, no one would be able to resist him.'[80] When the barbarians, according to Psellos, adopted a 'more reasonable' (λογικώτερον) approach to the war,[81] Psellos depicted them suing for peace: the narrative just shows the inconvenience of a conflict fuelled by Romanos' egotistic ambitions for glory.[82] The depiction of the battle only praises the Arabs' disorganised formation that gave the illusion of a bigger number and routed the Romans: not a tactic Psellos ever recommends for the Roman army itself. The rest of the account is a description of the disorderly flight of the Roman soldiers, subversive and dramatic, but not didactic in terms of military strategy.

All in all, though the ruler's clash with the enemy in the frontier constitutes a credible moment for the revelation of the actual strength of Romanos' character, Psellos does not link the revelation to any smaller technical detail. Everything he had to say about Romanos' character was stated before the emperor met the enemy: Romanos was overconfident, overly ambitious, and had not a real grasp of his surroundings. That is Psellos' conclusion for the character, repeated throughout the third book of the *Chronographia*, and even in the seventh book, when Romanos is found guilty of increasing the imperial expenses, fuelled by his illusory ambitions.[83]

The only tactical error mentioned by Psellos in the imperial campaign, overconfidence in numbers, reflects Psellos' constant preference for quality over quantity, which is connected to his notions of geometry and harmony, and these element's effect on human affairs. These

[80] *Chronographia* 3.7.12-15: ᾤετο γὰρ ὡς εἰ πλείω τοῦ ὡρισμένου, τοῦ στρατοπέδου τὸν ἀριθμὸν ποιήσειε· μᾶλλον δὲ εἰ πολλαπλασιάσειε τὸ Ῥωμαϊκὸν σύνταγμα, μηδενὶ ἂν φορητὸς γενέσθαι, τοσούτῳ ἐπιὼν πλήθει, ἰδίῳ τε καὶ συμμαχικῷ.
[81] *Chronographia* 3.8.7.
[82] *Chronographia* 3.8.
[83] *Chronographia* 7.53.

are Psellos' 'serious thoughts' on the matter, as shown throughout the *Chronographia*. Psellos uses the frontier to show the effect of his Neoplatonic thought in the world. Isaak is praised for using geometrical symbols: the circular solar orbit, the circular position of Isaak's company, and the musical harmony of their voices praising Isaak.[84] These are all symbols used to point at the ideal candidate for the throne. Isaak is praised in terms of his power to recreate an ideal order under the rough conditions of the frontier. But Psellos will destroy that. Once in the presence of the rebel court, Psellos elaborates a careful speech that forces his audience to recognise their perilous situation as usurpers, and then invites them to accept the emperor's generous offer. By doing so, Psellos brought Isaak's ordered court into chaos, and the voices that had sung in symphony before were now confused and divided.[85] Consequently, Isaak started to consider the emperor's offer.[86] The first part of the *Chronographia* ends with Isaak ascending to the throne, now legitimately and in alliance with his former competitor in terms of character perfection: Psellos himself. Again, the frontier is reclaimed as the space where the strong survive and the weak succumb; but for Psellos, that strength is phrased in terms of geometric perfection, *taxis*, and harmonisation with the cosmic order.[87] If these are the elements Psellos is prioritising in his account, does it make sense to include them as *realia*? Kaldellis argued that the generals' hesitation in Romanos' campaign was 'a sure sign that his motives were political and domestic'. It seems as likely that the supposed hesitation of Romanos' subalterns has more to do with Psellos' depiction of the character than an actual tactical issue on the ground.

In the case of Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, the appearance of an objective account of the events, an account we can write history books with, should be confronted with even more scepticism

[84] *Chronographia* 7.22-26.
[85] *Chronographia* 7.31.
[86] *Chronographia* 7.32-34.
[87] *Chronographia* 7.40-43.

than it is with regard to the *Chronographia.*[88] Skylitzes often summarises a campaign's outcome by proving the superiority of the ideal, masculine character. Battles are sometimes won by some military manoeuvre, but these often stem from a more moralistic discourse about the commander's right attitude towards the situation.[89] As we have seen, in his account of Isaak's *coup*, Skylitzes – possibly following the 'Source K' quite closely – compares the overconfidence of other potential rebels and the patience of Kekaumenos in setting the basis for a successful rebellion.[90] His focus is not in the technicalities of Kekaumenos' preparations, nor in the importance of luck in the process, but rather in demonstrating that Kekaumenos' patience and restraint brought the victory.[91] Skylitzes looks into the past and analyses the character's morality as the element behind both victory and defeat, finding them among the mainstream set of Byzantine moral values. These values, which praised idealised male figures, are the 'truth' Skylitzes claims to find in the frontier conflicts.

In the *History*, the impact of divine providence is more prominent and explicitly stated than in the other accounts. Emperors who venture to the frontier and meet the expectations of the imperial ideal will prevail.[92] It would be a mistake to summarise Romanos' defeat at Manzikert, in Attaleiates' account, as a tactical mistake. The *History* prepared this climactic moment by enumerating Romanos' mistakes and flaws. Attaleiates is very open about the connection between the two elements, predicting omens and a coming disgrace. Similarly, Isaak's reign is marked by omens. The tactical elements that explain, for example, his unsatisfactory conclusion of the campaign against the Pechenegs, cannot be considered in

[88] In this regard, see C. Holmes, 'The Rhetorical Structures of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 187-200.
[89] In the case of Constantine VIII, the eunuchs are held responsible for the government's misdoings: *Synopsis* 370.37; a previous example set on the reign of Romanos III is mentioned in note 177 from chapter 4, on page 184; during the reign of Constantine IX, for instance, the patrician Michael is presented as an unskilled commander (424.71-73), and the ruler of Tivion is depicted as victorious because of his military knowledge and astuteness (437.38-39) helped him to confuse the Roman generals, who acted impulsively (437.47-52).
[90] On the 'Source K', see page 69 above.
[91] *Synopsis* 489.79-492.68.
[92] *History* 196/151.18-27.

isolation, but in relation to Isaak's previous sinful actions. By the time Isaak marched to confront the Pecheneg armies, he had already awoken God's rage.[93]

Ultimately the frontier, although understood as a space where characters show their true abilities, is always presented according to the values chosen by the narrator, arranged in a narration *a posteriori*. Therefore, the reader must remain sceptical, considering the frontier as nothing but another scenario where ideals presented throughout the chronicle are celebrated as pragmatic and true.

5.2. Sacred Spaces

Towards the end of the *Synopsis*, Skylitzes narrates the *coup d'etat* that took place against Michael VI Stratiotikos inside the capital or, more accurately, inside the church of Hagia Sophia:

> [The patriarch himself] was the first to cry out the acclamation of approval and to permit the razing and pillaging of the houses of those high officials who were not pleased with what was happening: and he did it inside that sacred and famous church![94]

Skylitzes' words may sound hypocritical when compared with his own words two pages before in the text. There our author was describing the decisive battle that granted Isaak's victory over Michael's loyalists. According to Skylitzes, Isaak's army won the battle thanks to Kekaumenos' ruthless assault on the enemy camp.[95] Not only does Skylitzes label the action as decisive for Isaak's side, but he even blamed Michael's loyalists for not proceeding as ruthlessly as Kekaumenos: 'he [the *magister* Aaron] would have scored a complete victory if he had not been pious (εὐλαβὴς) and refrained from pillaging the encampment; Komnenos was

[93] Concerning Isaak's account, see pages 101-105 below and 280 above.
[94] *Synopsis* 499.65-67/464: καὶ τοὺς οἴκους τῶν ἐν ὑπεροχαῖς, ὅσοι μὴ ἠρέσκοντο τοῖς γινομένοις, ἀνασκάπτειν καὶ διαρπάζειν προτρέποντος. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ἔπραττεν ἔσωθεν τοῦ θείου καὶ περιωνύμου ναοῦ.
[95] *Synopsis* 495.47-54/460.

already unnerved and thinking of retreating to Nikaia'.[96] Nothing seems to indicate that Skylitzes is jumping from one source to another in this passage: he, and possibly the Kekaumenos-focused source he is using, finds it unproblematic to praise Kekaumenos' actions in the battle, and then condemn the patriarch's blasphemy immediately afterwards.[97]

Therefore, one may wonder how this narrator's moral system works in the *Synopsis.* I would suggest that Skylitzes considers Hagia Sophia and the battlefield to be spaces where different behavioural codes apply. Hagia Sophia is one of the key sacred spaces from an eleventh-century Byzantine viewpoint.[98] The importance of the spatial context in those two actions is so clear that Skylitzes does not feel compelled to add further justification. He unambiguously uses the setting to indicate expected behaviour: one must be ruthless on the battlefield, but pious within a sacred space.

Skylitzes' passage is exemplary of many other cases where the narrator cleverly uses the sacred space scenario to indicate the legitimacy of the actions committed by the characters.[99] I will analyse different examples of buildings, objects, or people that are qualified in the narrative as sacred (roughly qualified as ἅγιος or ἱερός). What may define the sacred quality of all the examples is their definition in the sources as especially pure, close to the divine. In relation to the dichotomy between centre and periphery, the sacred may be considered as another version of the centre, where the presence of the divine is more palpable.[100]

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[96] *Synopsis* 494.44-47/460: καὶ κἂν ἀπηνέγκατο καθαρὰν τὴν νίκην, εἰ μὴ λίαν ἐγένετο εὐλαβὴς καὶ τοῦ σκυλεῦσαι ἀπέσχετο τὴν παρεμβολήν, ἤδη καὶ τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ κατασεισθέντος καὶ φυγεῖν εἰς Νίκαιαν ἀποβλέποντος.
[97] Kekaumenos still has significant prominence at the end of the story, being the first to enter the palace: *Synopsis* 500.86.
[98] On the symbolic importance of Hagia Sophia, see B.V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (London 1997) esp. 2-3; on its role as centre of ceremonies: R. Macrides, J.A. Munitiz, and D. Angelov, *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan Court: Offices and Ceremonies* (Farnham 2013) 446.
[99] We find a further example on *Synopsis* 372, when a bishop is killed during the violent suppression of a rebellion during the reign of Constantine VIII: Skylitzes emphasises the impiety of the action; on the opposite side, Romanos III is praised, among other issues, for his generosity towards the Church in *Synopsis* 375.
[100] J. Shepard, 'Memoirs as Manifesto: The Rhetoric of Katakalon Kekaumenos', in T. Shawcross and I. Toth (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine empire and beyond* (Cambridge 2018) 206 notes that Kekaumenos did not present his actions 'in a particularly heroic mode'. I think the scope is, in fact, heroic, despite the uncanny praise to Kekaumenos' ruthlessness.

The contextualisation of a scene in a sacred space is thus another literary tool for the narrator to qualify the actions narrated. Skylitzes' condemnation of the patriarch's betrayal is even more compelling since he is explicitly situating the action inside Hagia Sophia. Independently of the objective conditions in which an event takes place, narrators can choose to underline or nuance the importance of one or another element in their story. Quite the opposite happened not much earlier in the *Synopsis*: an action is regarded as benign since it takes place within the holy church. There, the rebels led by Isaak, represented by Skylitzes as brave, sealed their alliance to destroy Michael's government and swore mutual support *inside* Hagia Sophia.[101] It is no surprise that this encomiastic account of Skylitzes mentioned this element, while Attaleiates' *History*, critical of the rebels, only mentioned the origins of the rebellion in passing, omitting any mention of the church.[102]

Churches play a substantial role in Attaleiates' *History* as a space used in order to underline the relation between the emperors' behaviour and divine retribution. Unfortunately, not much attention has been given to Attaleiates' emphasis on omens until recently. Pérez Martín, editor and translator of Attaleiates, overlooked these elements and instead focused on how Attaleiates often presents a 'physical' cause of events next to a 'supernatural' one. For Pérez Martín, it is the former cause that reflects the innermost thoughts of Attaleiates.[103] The example used by Pérez Martín corresponds to the concluding section of Constantine X Doukas' reign, where several earthquakes shook the land around the Marmara. As Pérez Martín suggested, Attaleiates quoted Strabo for an explanation of the phenomenon, only to later ascribe everything to God:

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[101] *Synopsis* 487.18-21: ἔπειτα καὶ ὑφ' ἕν ἐν τῇ μεγάλῃ γενόμενοι ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ ὅρκους δόντες καὶ λαβόντες μὴ σιωπῆσαι, μηδ' ἀνασχέσθαι, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἐνυβρίσαντας τιμωρήσασθαι, δεσμοῖς, ὅ φασιν, ἀδαμαντίνοις ἠσφαλίσαντο τὴν ἐπιβουλήν.

[102] *History* 53/42.20-43.4. And what of the *Chronographia*? There is no clear answer to this. However, it must be noted that Psellos starts his narration on Michael's reign from the point of view of a member of Michael's court, and less of an omniscient narrator who follows Isaak through his rebellion.

[103] See chapter 2 on the overall discussion about Attaleiates and his *History*; Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xv-xvi.

> This sanction is the work of divine forbearance whose goal is not to utterly destroy mankind but to turn it to a better path. That earthquakes are caused by air flows or the motion of the waters is not out of place considering the interconnected structure of nature, and it is even likely to be true to a certain extent. However, the shaking does not happen randomly – this is what is being refuted by us – rather, it is caused by divine will, given that God does not govern the things of this world in an unmediated way. Thus, the immediate cause of rain appears to be the gathering of clouds and the cause of thunder and lightning their crashing together, but everything, according to those who think in a pious way (τοὺς εὐσεβοῦντας), depends on divine will.[104]

In my view, the two sets of explanations should not be regarded as contradictory for any Byzantine narrator. Furthermore, as the narration moves on, Attaleiates delves into the relation between the earthquakes and divine punishment. He does so by bringing to the audience's attention the destruction of the churches of Hagia Sophia and Holy Fathers in Nikaia. The latter building hosted the First Ecumenical Council during the rule of Constantine the Great, Attaleiates reminds his audience. It is only after these exceedingly significant buildings were destroyed that the earthquakes ceased.[105] The earthquakes therefore play the role of a divine omen. The comet described subsequently pointed to the east: specifically, the region where the narrative will focus in the next pages up to the disaster at Manzikert.[106] All these signs follow after the military disasters of Constantine X, which were clearly related by Attaleiates to the emperor's greedy policies and wicked character. Thus, the destruction of the churches in Nikaia illustrate the climax of divine rage towards an incompetent and immoral emperor. These divine

[104] *History* 89/71.4-14: καὶ τῆς θείας ἀνεξικακίας ἡ ἐπιτίμησις, ἐφ' ᾧ μὴ ἄρδην ἀπολέσθαι τὸ γένος ἀλλ' ἐπιστρέψαι πρὸς τὰ βελτίονα. Τὸ δ' ἐξ ἐπιπνοίας ἀνεμιαίας εἴτε μὴν ὑδάτων κινήσεως γίνεσθαι τὸν σεισμόν, οὐκ ἄκαιρον οὐδ' αὐτὸ πρὸς φυσικὴν συγκατασκευήν, ἐνδέχεται γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ πάνυ, ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐτομάτως ἡ ἐπισκίρτησις, τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ ἀνατρεπόμενον παρ' ἡμῶν, ἀλλ' ἐκ θείου βουλήματος, ὅτι μὴ ἀμέσως τὸ θεῖον τὰ περὶ τὴν γῆΐνην φύσιν οἰκονομεῖ, οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ὑετοῦ ἡ νεφῶν συμπίλησις καὶ βροντῆς ἡ τούτων σύγκρουσις καὶ ἀστραπῆς ἐπὶ ταύτῃ παραίτιοι καταφαίνονται, ἀλλὰ τὸ πᾶν τῆς θείας γνώμης κατὰ τοὺς εὐσεβοῦντας ἐξήρτηται.

[105] *History* 90-91/72.10-25; esp. 20-25: Καὶ ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας τὰ τοῦ τρόμου κατέληξεν, ἦσαν δὲ ταῦτα καὶ εἴσπραξις ἁμαρτημάτων καὶ χόλος θεῖος ἐξάπαντος, ᾐνίττοντο δὲ ὡς ἔοικε καὶ τὴν τοῦ εἰρημένου ἔθνους ἐπιφοίτησιν καὶ κατάλυσιν, ἐν γὰρ ταῖς θεοσημείαις πρὸς τοῖς εἰρημένοις καί τι μέλλον ἐπισκῆψαι προτεθεώρηται. Attaleiates explicitly ascribes to the earthquake, as a divine sign, the capacity to both show divine content and a prophetic power.

[106] *History* 91/72.26-73.5: Ἀπέτεινε δὲ τὰς ἀκτῖνας ὡς πρὸς ἑῴαν καὶ ὡς πρὸς ἐκείνην προήρχετο.

signs do not conflict with Attaleiates' geographical digression. The digression is rather integrated in the larger narration, which stresses the importance of omens.

Incorporating sacred spaces in accounts of divine retribution is a reiterative element within the *History*. The reign of Romanos IV swiftly moves from an initially triumphalist tone to the depiction of an increasing number of impious actions taken by the new emperor and negative divine omens. These, Attaleiates argued, were indicative of an incoming disaster. The first of these signs was the burning of the sanctuary of the Virgin of Blachernai in the winter of 1069, right after Romanos' inconclusive campaign that year.[107] 'The sacred', as a context that brings previous experiences and expectations to the minds of the audience, can go beyond the space of a holy church. In 1071, right before the decisive clash at Manzikert, Romanos punished a Roman soldier who stole from the Turks; the soldier is sentenced to have his nose mutilated. The man appealed to the emperor in vain:

> The man begged and begged: he offered all his possessions and invoked the intercession of the most revered image of our glorious Lady, the Mother of God of Blachernai, the image which usually accompanies the faithful emperors on their campaigns as an invincible weapon. But the emperor would show no mercy, not even reverence for the sanctuary provided by the holy icon. In the sight of the emperor and the whole army, even with the icon itself held aloft, the wretch had his nose cut off with loud cries and groans of pain. At the time this struck me as ominous, and I felt that some great vengeance would come upon us from God.[108]

A religious ceremony takes place in Romanos' camp shortly after. The words of the priest reading the Gospel becomes another sacred element, reminding the audience of the divine origin of both punishment and reward. They prophesise the incoming military disaster:

> If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you because they do not know him who sent

[107] *History* 138/108.1-3: καὶ τὸ ἔτος ἐτελεύτα ἐκεῖνο, ἰνδικτιῶνος ἐνισταμένης ὀγδόης τοῦ ϛφοη΄ ἔτους, ὅτε καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἱερὸν τῶν Βλαχερνῶν ἕως ἐδάφους ἐπυρπολήθη.

[108] *History* 153/118.18-28: πολλὰ δὲ παρακαλέσαντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πάντα τὰ ἑαυτοῦ προεμένου καὶ προβαλλομένου μεσίτην τὴν πάνσεπτον εἰκόνα τῆς πανυμνήτου δεσποίνης Θεοτόκου τῆς Βλαχερνιτίσσης, ἥτις εἰώθει τοῖς πιστοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐν ἐκστρατείαις ὡς ἀπροσμάχητον ὅπλον συνεκστρατεύεσθαι, οὐκ εἰσήει οἶκτος τῷ βασιλεῖ ἀλλ' οὐδ' αἰδὼς τῆς ἐκ τοῦ θείου εἰκονίσματος ἀσυλίας, ὁρῶντος δ' αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντων καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς εἰκόνος βασταζομένης, ἀπετμήθη τὴν ῥῖνα ὁ δείλαιος, κράξας μεγάλα καὶ στενάξας τὸ βύθιον. Τότε δὴ τότε μεγάλην ἡμῖν ἔσεσθαι τὴν ἐκ τοῦ θείου νέμεσιν προωπτευσάμην αὐτός.

> me. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.[109]

Characters from the story are also occasionally defined by their perceived sacredness. The passage on the blinding of Romanos IV follows shortly after. Both narrations stress that the victims beg for mercy. In the case of Romanos' blinding, he begs the bishops of Chalkedon, Herakleia, and Koloneia for their support, but they feel powerless against the authorities who execute Emperor Michael's orders.[110] Attaleiates declares his irritation at Michael's lack of mercy.[111] All in all, it seems fair to suggest that the depiction of Romanos begging the bishops is meant to emphasise Michael's actions as impious: prominent clergy members disapproved the decision, thus underlining its illegitimacy. To elucidate his point further, Attaleiates qualifies Romanos' eyes as sacred: Romanos 'was to be deprived of light itself and the power of visual perception that was given to him by God'.[112] Thus, the orders to blind him are depicted as a case of the violation of divine will. Later in the text, Romanos himself becomes a holy figure, through his identification with Job and the hagiographic tone adopted by the narrator.[113]

There are several cases of clergymen being inserted into the story as a way to tilt the moral-tone of a scene in a specific direction. Since the members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy are expected to achieve higher moral grounds than other members of society, narrators can play with these expectations. For example, the *Synopsis* portrays the death of Romanos III and the ascension of Michael IV in a radically subversive manner by noting the involvement of the

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[109] *History* 154-155/119.27-120.2: εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν· εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν· ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ποιήσουσιν ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐκ οἴδασι τὸν πέμψαντά με· ἀλλ' ἔρχεται ὥρα ἵνα πᾶς ὁ ἀποκτείνας ὑμᾶς, δόξῃ λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ; the passage constitutes a citation of John 15:20-16:2; Macrides convincingly discussed Attaleiates' reflection of omens and prophecies before the disaster at Manzikert in R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C.N. Constantinides, N.M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys, and A.D. Angelou (eds.), *Philellen: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996) 205-224, esp. 209-210.
[110] *History* 178/137.11-12.
[111] *History* 167-168/129.19-24, and 177/137.4-5.
[112] *History* 176/136.14-16: Ἀποστερηθῆναι καὶ αὐτοῦ φωτὸς καὶ τῆς δεδομένης αὐτῷ θεόθεν τῶν ὁρωμένων κατανοήσεως τίνα;
[113] *History* 179/138.25-139.4; see pages 278-287 on Attaleiates' depiction of Romanos IV.

Patriarch Alexios in the process. Skylitzes qualifies Michael's coronation as a wicked act, by showing the clergyman who crowned him as succumbing to the sin of greed:

> That very night [after Romanos' assassination], while they were singing of the Saviour's sufferings [it was Holy Thursday], the Patriarch Alexios was summoned, allegedly by the emperor Romanos, to come up to the palace. When he got there, he found the emperor Romanos dead. The Chrysotriklinos was all decked out; sitting on a throne, Zoe brought in Michael and would have the patriarch marry him to her. Alexios was astounded at her demand and stood there speechless, at a loss whether or not to comply. But John [Orphanotrophos], together with Zoe, gave fifty pounds of gold to the patriarch and fifty to the clergy – which convinced them to perform the priestly office.[114]

Wortley tries to explain the patriarch's hesitation in relation to the conventions of widowhood, which should have demanded that Zoe should wait to remarry.[115] However, Skylitzes' depiction of Alexios' initial hesitation, together with the framing of the scene on Holy Thursday and the patriarch's surprise on learning of Romanos' death, is focused on the delegitimisation of Michael's election as emperor. Although Skylitzes does not use explicit moralistic statements as much as Attaleiates, he – or his source – arranged the elements as such to formulate a powerful message.

Apart from sacred buildings, objects, and individuals, Attaleiates alluded to the sacred community that binds Romans with other Christian peoples, and evidences the sundering of those who were 'previously allies and formed part of our commonwealth, even practising the same religion, [who] most unexpectedly now became our enemies' due to Michael Dokeianos'

[114] *Synopsis* 390.95-391.8: καὶ ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ τῶν ἁγίων παθῶν ψαλλομένων μηνύεται ὁ πατριάρχης Ἀλέξιος ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως Ῥωμανοῦ τάχα ἀνελθεῖν ἐν τοῖς ἀνακτόροις καὶ ἀνελθὼν εὑρίσκει μὲν νεκρὸν τὸν ἄνακτα Ῥωμανόν, τοῦ χρυσοτρικλίνου δὲ κοσμηθέντος ἐπὶ βήματος καθίσασα ἡ Ζωὴ ἐξάγει τὸν Μιχαήλ, καὶ τὸν πατριάρχην καταναγκάζει ἱερολογῆσαι τοῦτον αὐτῇ. ὁ δὲ τῷ λόγῳ ἐκθαμβηθεὶς ἵστατο ἐννεὸς καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἱερολογίαν ἐνεδοίαζεν. ἀλλ' ὁ Ἰωάννης σὺν τῇ Ζωῇ πεντήκοντα μὲν χρυσίου λίτρας τῷ πατριάρχῃ, πεντήκοντα δὲ τῷ κλήρῳ δοὺς ἔπεισεν ἱεροτελεστίας αὐτοὺς ἀξιῶσαι.

[115] J. Wortley, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057* (Cambridge 2010) 369, n. 84.

misdeeds'.[116] Attaleiates reproached the Romans for not living up to the ideal of a Christian community linking all, including Italians and Albanians.[117]

The relationship between Isaak I Komnenos and the patriarch, already discussed in previous chapters,[118] can be also considered from the point of view of sacred space. Krallis' view on their relationship leads him to conclude that Isaak is overall praised by Attaleiates, whilst he 'used the patriarch as a model of disruptive political behaviour set up against Isaakios I Komnenos' positively assessed efforts to heal the ailing Byzantine body politic'.[119]

Krallis' view is grounded on a different interpretation of the evidence we have already considered. The most explicit praise of Isaak by Attaleiates relates to the emperor's economic policy, which includes an imposed austerity over monastic properties. Attaleiates argues that, while 'the more religious people unthinkingly considered it even to be sacrilege, those who understand matters more carefully realised that its results were in fact advantageous'.[120] It meant a separation of the monasteries from wealth management that was unnatural to their tasks. It would help the rural communities, which were normally controlled by the monasteries, and finally it would also fill the imperial Treasury.[121] Only then does the patriarchal exile follow in the narration, which, Attaleiates explains, was caused by the man's arrogance towards Isaak and therefore deserved: 'the emperor's favour made him audacious'.[122] After the lengthy passage on the exile, other sections of the account refer to Isaak's unresolved war against the

[116] *History* 9/7.19-25: Οὐ μὴν δὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ οἵ ποτε σύμμαχοι καὶ τῆς ἰσοπολιτείας ἡμῖν συμμετέχοντες, ὡς καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς θρησκείας ... πολέμιοι παραλογώτατοι ἐχρημάτισαν.
[117] Concerning Attaleiates' 'hypothetical reasoning': L.R. Cresci, 'Anticipazione e possibilità: moduli interpretativi della storia di Michele Attaliata', *Italoellhnika* 3 (1993) 71-96; A. Olson, "*Part of Our Commonwealth": A Study of the Normans in Eleventh-Century Byzantine Historiography* [PhD thesis, 2011].
[118] See pages 99-110 above.
[119] D. Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor, Holy Patriarch: A New Reading of the Clash between Emperor Isaakios I and Patriarch Michael Keroularios in Attaleiates' *History*, *BSl* 67 (2009) 170.
[120] *History* 61/49.10-13: πρᾶγμα παρανομίας μὲν δόξαν ἢ ἀσεβείας εἰσάγον καὶ πρὸς ἱεροσυλίαν τοῖς εὐλαβεστέροις ἐκ τοῦ προχείρου ἀναφερόμενον, ἀποτέλεσμα δὲ μηδὲν ἄτοπον ἀποφέρον πρός γε τοὺς ἐμβριθῶς τὰ πράγματα διακρίνοντας.
[121] *History* 61-62/49.13-27.
[122] *History* 62/49.32: θαρρήσας τῇ τοῦ κρατοῦντος εὐνοίᾳ.

Kumans, a number of negative omens concerning Isaak, and finally his illness and death. The very last lines about Isaak describe the miracle of his tomb exuding moisture, a typical attribute found in saintly burials.[123]

On first sight, praise and reproach coexist in the depiction of both emperor and patriarch. As argued earlier, the contradictions in the patriarch's image result from his character being secondary to the depiction of Emperor Isaak. Krallis noted that the patriarch is the only character in the *History* whose narrative arc covered two reigns. Keroularios appears as an active character during Michael VI's reign, and throughout Isaak's. For Krallis, this is a signal for his importance in the *History*.[124] However, much like Empress Zoe's depiction in the *Chronographia*, Keroularios' reiterated presence during several reigns is largely to do with his effective position at the centre of the political scene. Nevertheless, both characters are depicted in remarkably different ways, dependent on their place within the narrative, since the story is mostly focused on the – male – ruler. Attaleiates first criticises the patriarch for his betrayal of Michael VI, but later focuses on the sanctity of the man. This change means that the principle of divine retribution is still applied to Keroularios – after all, he dies in exile – but the major blame falls on Isaak.

Krallis did not consider this juxtaposition in the patriarch's depiction, and instead assumed that Attaleiates attempted a coherent depiction of both aspects of Keroularios. He prioritises Attaleiates' positive comments on Isaak's economic policies, and deduces that the patriarch embodies the opposition to these sensible reforms. Although Attaleiates did not support any particular interpretation of the miraculous moisture on Isaak's sarcophagus,[125] Krallis looked deeper into Attaleiates' words. When the narrator offers different explanations for the moisture, there is no trace of the patriarch's exile among the list of the elements for

[123] *History* 69-70/55.18-56.10.
[124] Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor', 179.
[125] *History* 69/55.18-19: …ὑγρότητος μεστὴ θεαθεῖσα ἡ τούτου σορός…

which Isaak should be condemned. However, Krallis points out, Attaleiates' mention of contrition and divine forgiveness of all sins may imply Attaleiates' support of Isaak's impious, yet necessary, austerity policies.[126] This leads Krallis to his conclusion: Attaleiates praised Isaak for his reforms, which included a rough reduction of pious donations, while criticising the patriarch for his opposition to these measures. In Krallis' opinion, Attaleiates' depiction of the patriarch as a holy figure was monolithic.

If, however, we evaluate Attaleiates' use of space in the narrative, we come to a different conclusion. Krallis reads the account on Isaak's reign as a cryptic message awaiting decipherment once different dots are connected. If, instead, we follow the account's narrative flow, the passage works more as a trip through straightforward sensational messages. To begin with, Krallis' argument is supported by Attaleiates' apparently positive approach to Isaak's initial reforms, which include cuts in donations to the church. However, this is not a theme that comes across throughout the *History,* rather the opposite: emperors are often blamed, and divinely punished, for ordering greedy cuts to philanthropic expenses. This is the case at the end of the narration on Constantine Monomachos' reign, right before the narrative arc of Michael VI and his usurper Isaak I begins. There Attaleiates' points at Constantine's abuse of tax collection as the possible cause of divine punishment. Constantine died, and was even unable to name an heir. Among the victims of the 'horrible situation' created by Constantine's policy we find 'properties that had been set aside for the support of the holy churches and monasteries'.[127] If the *History* was meant to direct an audience towards praising austerity in regard to pious donations, this and other passages would blur that argument.[128]

[126] Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor', 173.
[127] *History* 51/40.27-32.
[128] Another example could be Attaleiates' indirect criticism to Nikephoritzes' capitalisation of the grain trade directed to Hagia Sophia and other monastic foundations through the *phoundax* installed in Raidestos: *History* 201/155.23.27; I examine this matter with more detail in F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'Poverty, Imperial Philanthropy, and Political Ideology in the Historical Accounts of Michael Psellos and Michael Attaleiates', in L. Brubaker, A. Kelley, and F. Vanni (eds.), *Skint: Peasants and Poverty in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2020) [in press].

Attaleiates' apparently generous words towards Isaak's policies follow the pattern of other reigns, which begin with positive lines that later give rise to criticism.[129] Criticism often relies on the emperors' unfair treatment of their benefactors, as in the case of Michael V's exile of Zoe or Michael VII's decision to blind Romanos.[130] In this case, Keroularios becomes Isaak's benefactor: he supported Isaak during the civil war. Keroularios' position as Isaak's benefactor is underlined by showing Isaak's initial deference towards the patriarch. Attaleiates is laying the groundwork for the main story of the patriarch's exile, firstly by mentioning his role in the emperor's coronation, then by explaining in detail the generous policy of Isaak towards the patriarch's see.[131] Attaleiates is not connecting Isaak's reforms to the patriarch's initial arrogance at the beginning of the account on his exile. Instead, the arrogance of the patriarch soon leads to a different, more hagiographical depiction of his character. This has little to do with Attaleiates' thoughts on Keroularios. The more the patriarch is described with respect to his sanctity, the more the audience will conceive of his exile as an impious order. Even after the patriarch's death, his hand is said to remain uncorrupted, frozen in an attitude of blessing. Keroularios' death is even said to have been prophesised through a holy man that announced him that God would soon summon him to his side.[132]

In sum, Attaleiates portrays Isaak's exile of the patriarch as a solid criticism to the emperor. The initial positive words on the emperor's management of the empire's wealth lead to a progressive depiction of the emperor as impious, and therefore punished by God, as reflected in both the omens before his death and the miraculous moisture in his sarcophagus afterwards, which, Attaleiates noted, many recognised as a sign of divine punishment.[133] The

[129] This would be the case of the reigns of Michael V, Constantine X, Romanos IV and, even for a few lines, Michael VII. This issue will be further discussed in the next chapter, on narrative rhythm.
[130] *History* 17/14.13-15; 176/136.16-17.
[131] *History* 59-62.
[132] *History* 65/52.13-14.
[133] See note 125 from this chapter. Attaleiates presented different interpretations for the phenomenon, but focused in describing those who read it as a sign of divine punishment, even offering counter-arguments to those

use of different elements redirecting to a sacred context further underline the piety of the patriarch before and during his exile, and therefore contribute to Attaleiates' case against Emperor Isaak.[134]

Unlike Attaleiates, Michael Psellos dedicates only a few lines in his *Chronographia* to Patriarch Keroularios' exile. Rather, he spends more words describing the sanctity of the new patriarch Leichoudes, appointed by Isaak himself. Psellos concluded that the appointment of Leichoudes paid a compliment to Keroularios.[135] Describing a holy man thus plays a role in the definition of Isaak Komnenos both in the *History* and in the *Chronographia*. In the former, Isaak is put to shame by Attaleiates by underlining the impiety of his rule though the patriarch's exile. Psellos remains more discreet when discussing the exile, but praises Leichoudes as ideal, and consequently glorifies Isaak for his choice. These examples show the diverse possibilities, as well as the narrative efficacy, of describing holy spaces and people in order to make a political point.

Arguments on the use of sacred space become more complicated when analysing the *Chronographia*. Psellos is vocal on the lack of credibility of sacred figures or objects. For instance, Zoe's devotion to a self-made icon of Christ, which communicated with her depending on its changing colours, has been approached by scholars as both a sincere depiction of the empress' sanctity, and as a subversive account that implied the performance of pagan oracles at the very centre of the Byzantine court.[136] Psellos seemed less ambiguous, however, when he commented on monastic life and the monks who surrounded the empress Theodora:

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who read the miracle as a sign of Isaak's reconciliation with the divine; see page 105 below for a comparison between Attaleiates' account and Skylitzes' regarding this episode.

[134] A similar story can be found in earlier depictions of the patriarch Photios in the *Synopsis*, defending his bishop Santabarenos against the emperor Leo: *Synopsis* 173.6-174.51; a different version, completely unfavourable towards Santabarenos, appears in John Zonaras' *Epitome*, 440.

[135] *Chronographia* 7.67. Leichoudes is previously introduced in 6.181. Comparing the *Chronographia* and the *History* also proves to be revealing when looking at the otherwise discreet political agenda of the *Continuation* of Skylitzes. That will be covered in the next chapter, on narrative tempo.

[136] *Chronographia* 6.66; see note 180 from chapter 3 for further discussion.

> The extremely generous persons who passed all bounds of liberality, with their munificent gifts, were not angels carrying messages to [Theodora] from God, but men, who imitated the angelic beings in outward appearance, and at heart were hypocrites. I am referring to the Naziraeans of our time. These men model themselves on the Divine, or rather they have a code of laws which is, superficially, based on the imitation of the Divine. While still subject to the limitations of human nature, they behave as though they were demi-gods among us.[137]

Psellos has particularly critical views of ecclesiastics. A number of elements that other writers would count as praiseworthy and sacred are used as markers of criticism or parody in the *Chronographia*. Kaldellis' analysis of the *Chronographia* uses these elements to point out the unusual distance of Psellos from mainstream notions of the sacred.[138]

However, Psellos' criticism is not unusual as Kaldellis suggests, nor does his depiction of the sacred follow this trend altogether.[139] Middle Byzantine *typika* would agree with Psellos in criticising some monastic communities for living far from the ideal for a monk, even if different monks would disagree in defining the monastic ideal and the means to achieve it.[140] Furthermore, contemporary satirical poems join Psellos in subverting sacred festivities, the reputation of ecclesiastics, and even holy ways of life. In the recently published collection of eleventh-century Byzantine satirical poems one can find criticism of the ignorance of some ecclesiastics, satires on monastic laziness or on the trade of fake relics, religious ceremonies

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[137] *Chronographia* 6a.18.1-7: οἱ δὲ οὕτω φιλοτιμότατοι· καὶ ταῖς μεγαλοδωρεαῖς πᾶσαν γνώμην ἐλευθέριον ὑπερβάλλοντες, οὐκ ἄγγελοί τινες, τὰ παρὰ τοῦ Κρείττονος ἐκείνῃ διαπορθμεύοντες· ἀλλ' οἱ ἐκείνους τῷ μὲν σχήματι μιμούμενοι· ταῖς δὲ γνώμαις ὑποκρινόμενοι (λέγω δὲ τοὺς καθ' ἡμᾶς Ναζιραίους), οἳ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον μεταπλαττόμενοι· μᾶλλον δὲ νομοθετούμενοι καταπλάττεσθαι, πρὶν ἢ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν ὑπεξελθεῖν, ὡς ἡμίθεοί τινες παρ' ἡμῖν ἀναστρέφονται.

[138] A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Michael Psellos'* Chronographia (Boston, MA 1999) 45.

[139] For an in-depth analysis of Psellos' views on monasticism, see F. Lauritzen, 'Psellos and the Nazireans', *REB* 65 (2007) 359-364.

[140] In last decades, discussion on 'monastic reformation' has become one of the most debated areas within Byzantine monastic studies: H. Ewing, 'Translation and Opportunity: Byzantine Monastic Studies since ca. 1990', *Religion Compass* 12.1-2 (2018) 1-12; earlier approaches by John Thomas envisioned a more homogeneous eleventh-century monastic reformation, heavily inspired by the *typikon* of the monastery of Evergetis: see esp. J.P. Thomas, 'Documentary Evidence from the Byzantine Monastic *Typika* for the History of the Evergetine Reform Movement', in M. Mullett and A. Kirby (eds.), *The Theotokos Evergetis and the Eleventh-Century Monasticism* (Belfast 1994) 246-273; more recent approaches show scepticism to Thomas' line of thought and point to the diversity of traditions in the *typika*: D. Krausmüller, 'The Abbots of Evergetis as Opponents of "Monastic Reform": A Re-Appraisal of the Monastic Discourse in 11th and 12th Century Constantinople', *Revue des études byzantines* 69 (2011), 111-134.

ridiculed and the description of a poor man who was forced to 'live like an Apostle', likely an ironic reference to Christian morality.[141]

Kaldellis' conviction that the *Chronographia* renders any reference to the sacred satirical or as a statement which proves the inefficacy of traditional religion leads to a reading of the text which is an extremely cynical, modern perspective. In order to revise Psellos' approach to sacred spaces, I will discuss his description of churches and monasteries. There are four descriptions of sacred buildings in the *Chronographia*, three of them described as their patrons were building them. Overall, the account seems to contain explicit criticism over the rulers' expenses in sacred buildings:

> The public revenues were expended not on the organisation of the army, but on favours to civilians and on magnificent shows. Finally, to ensure that after their death the funerals should be more impressive and the interment more extravagant, they prepared monuments of Phrygian or Italian marble, or Proconnesian slabs. Houses were then built round them and churches lent them sanctity … Then, as they had to enrich their places of meditation (the name they invented for these buildings) with money and possessions, they not only emptied the palace treasury, but even cut into the money contributed by the people to the public revenues.[142]

Kaldellis concludes that, in this and other passages, 'faith is again subordinated to political necessity', which constituted a 'rejection of the other-worldly values of Christianity'.[143] There is no doubt that Psellos was critical of the mismanagement of the Treasury. However, he is not simply criticising the construction of ecclesiastic buildings, but the selfishness of constructing funerary monuments by the emperors for themselves. Psellos' criticism of sacred elements has some limitations, and it is in the descriptions of the different churches where one can witness

[141] These poems are 1 [1K], 3 [4K], 9 [29K], 22 [63K], 33 [114K], 34 [120K], 39 [135K], 41 [21W], 42 [22 W], 48 [67W], and 57 [4M], in Amado Rodriguez and Ortega Villaro 2016: *Poesía lúdico-satírica bizantina del siglo XI* (Madrid 2016).

[142] *Chronographia* 7.59.3-13; ταῖς τε δημοσίοις συνεισφοραῖς οὐκ εἰς στρατιωτικὰς συντάξεις ἀποχρωμένων· ἀλλ' εἰς πολιτικὰς χάριτας· καὶ λαμπρότητας· τέλος δὲ, καὶ ὅπως ἂν αὐτοῖς τὸ σῶμα τελευτήσασι λαμπρότερον ἐκκομισθείη· καὶ κατατεθείη πολυτελέστερον, μνήματα κατασκευασάντων Φρυγίου λίθου ἢ Ἰταλοῦ· ἢ προικοννησίας πλακὸς, οἴκοις ταῦτα περιῳκοδομηκότων καὶ ναοῖς τιμησάντων … εἶτα δὴ δεῆσαν αὐτοῖς, χρήμασί τε καὶ κτήμασι κατευδαιμονίσαι τὰ ἀσκητήρια (τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ τὸ ὄνομα ταῖς οἰκοδομαῖς ἐσχεδίαζον), τὰ μὲν τὰ τῶν ἀνακτόρων ἀποκενούντων ταμεῖα, τὰ δὲ τὰς δημοσίους ἀκρωτηριαζόντων τῶν κοινῶν συνεισφορῶν ἀφορμὰς.

[143] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 82; other scholars concluded likewise: A. *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge 1989), esp. 188.

the harmonisation of Psellos' Neoplatonic background and with mainstream elevation of contemporary sacred monuments.

Firstly, the monastery of Saint Basil built by the eunuch and *parakoimomenos* Basil is, remarkably, the only ecclesiastic building in the *Chronographia* the description of which is not related to a narration of its construction. Instead, Psellos narrates its destruction by Emperor Basil II's orders. After the rebellions of Skleros and Phokas were suffocated, Basil's new autocratic agenda moved him mercilessly to depose the formerly powerful *parakoimomenos*.[144] One should note Psellos' link between the eunuch Basil's loss of power and the illness that afflicts him. Psellos subtly links the slow destruction of the building with the eunuch Basil's physical paralysis.

> The *parakoimomenos* had built a magnificent monastery in honour of Basil the Great, a monastery that bore his own name too. … The emperor now wished to raze this edifice to the ground. However, since he was careful to avoid the charge of impiety, only certain parts of the monastery were removed, and not all those at once. … Naturally, the *parakoimomenos*, tortured like this day after day, was filled with despair. There was no relief for his suffering, no consolation whatever. Suddenly cast down, in one brief moment, from his great position of power, this high and mighty man, whose heart had once been filled with pride, now became unable to govern his own body. His limbs were paralysed and he became a living corpse.[145]

The passage gives us a clue on the connection between a given character's *ethos* and the buildings and works under his or her patronage. Another example can be found during Romanos III's reign. This ruler is overall painted as a delusional character. Apart from Psellos' description of his *ethos*, this negative facet of his character is highlighted by other related elements of the story, including the depiction of a generation of flawed philosophers rising under his patronage and his intention to start a dynasty, despite his advanced age and that of

[144] The tone of Psellos' criticism towards Basil will be discussed on pages 264-278.

[145] *Chronographia* 1.20.10-21.5: ἀμέλει· καὶ ἣν ἐκεῖνος ἐδείματο λαμπροτάτην μονὴν, Βασιλείῳ τῷ πάνυ ἀναθέμενος, ἐπώνυμον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ κλήσεως,… ἐβούλετο μὲν, ἐκ θεμελίων καθαιρήσειν. τὸ δὲ τῆς πράξεως ἀναιδὲς εὐλαβούμενος, τὸ μὲν, ἐκεῖθεν ὑφῄρει τὰ ἔπιπλα …. τοιούτοις οὖν ὁ παρακοιμώμενος καθ' ἑκάστην τοξεύμασιν βαλλόμενος ὡς εἰπεῖν, ἀθυμίας τε ἐνεπίμπλατο· καὶ οὐκ εἶχεν ὅπως ἂν ἑαυτῷ τὰς ἀλγηδόνας ἰάσαιτο. παρηγόρει γὰρ αὐτὸν τῶν ὅλων οὐδέν. ὅθεν ἅπαξ ποτὲ, ἀθρόον κατασεισθεὶς ὁ ὑπερμεγέθης ἐκεῖνος· καὶ νέφους τὴν κεφαλὴν πληρωθεὶς, ἀκρατὴς ἑαυτοῦ ἐγεγόνει·

his wife Zoe.[146] Psellos' *ekphrasis* of the church build under Romanos' patronage, dedicated to Mary Peribleptos, is yet another proof of Romanos' flawed character:

> While Romanus manifested his piety in these activities, he showed himself a rogue from the very start, because he used money which had been contributed for quite different purposes than the building of his church. Doubtless it is a beautiful thing to love the House of the Lord, and make it magnificent …. But, surely, there should be nothing to mar this devotion. It cannot be right, in order to show one's piety, to commit great injustices, to put the whole state in confusion, to break down the whole body politic. … The symmetry of walls, the encircling columns, the hanging tapestries, the magnificent offerings, and the other things of like splendour – what can they contribute to the sacred object of piety? … In a word, it is sufficient if a man be without guile, and because of this simple faith there is built up within us a temple of another sort, a temple acceptable to the Lord and beloved by Him.[147]

Kaldellis doubted that Psellos would consider the church of any value and concluded that Psellos 'gradually stripped away from true religion everything that is recognisably Christian'.[148] In my view, the *Chronographia*'s intended audience would not deduce this from the narration. They would rather frame Psellos' comments as criticism of the emperor Romanos III. The narrator focused on the emperor before and after articulating this digression, intending to portray his presumed piety as false, just as everything else in his reign was. Psellos followed his comments on the church with:

> The philosophy Romanus knew was concerned with scholarly inquiries … but in his works he had no idea at all how to show forth that philosophic spirit. Even if the emperor felt compelled to build on a more magnificent scale than anyone else, it was still his duty to care for his palace, to glorify the acropolis, to repair what had fallen in ruins, to replenish the imperial treasury, and to dedicate money to the

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[146] See pages 83-88 above.

[147] *Chronographia* 3.15.1-21: καὶ περὶ τὸ θεῖον δῆθεν εὐσεβῶν ὁ βασιλεὺς, ἀφ' ἑστίας κακουργῶν διεδείκνυτο, ταῖς τῶν ἀλλοτρίων εἰσπράξεσιν εἰς τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ νεὼ καταχρώμενος. καλὸν μὲν γὰρ ἀγαπᾶν εὐπρέπειαν οἴκου Κυρίου, ... ἀλλ' ἔνθα μηδὲν εἴη τὸ λυμαινόμενον τὸν εὐσεβῆ τοῦτον σκοπὸν· μηδὲ πολλαὶ ἀδικίαι συντρέχοιεν· μηδὲ συγχέοιτο τὰ κοινὰ· καὶ τὸ τῆς πολιτείας σῶμα καταρρηγνύοιτο. ... ἰσότητες δὲ τοίχων· καὶ κιόνων περιβολαὶ· καὶ ὑφασμάτων αἰῶραι· καὶ θυμάτων πολυτέλεια· καὶ τἄλλα τῶν οὕτω λαμπρῶν, τί ἂν συντελοίη πρὸς τὸν θεῖον τῆς εὐσεβείας σκοπόν; ... ἢ μᾶλλον τὸ τῆς διαθέσεως ἀσχημάτιστον, δι' ὧν ἕτερός τις ἡμῖν ἔνδον οἰκοδομεῖται νεὼς, εὐπρόσδεκτος Κυρίῳ· καὶ εὐαπόδεκτος.; the erection of this church is discussed in the context of Romanos' whole reign in page 87 from chapter 3.

[148] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 72:

> [Psellos'] rhetorical question effectively denies that church decorations possess any innate religious value whatsoever, although the thrust of his criticism is partially blunted by the continued reference to "luxury". But this is an escape clause; we can hardly believe that Psellos would be satisfied if the walls were not symmetrical and the "other things" were not "magnificent".… Thus in section 3.15, after denying that Emperors should spend money on the Church, Psellos calls into question the religious value of the entire artistic and ceremonial tradition of the Byzantine Church.

> upkeep of his armies. *Yet he neglected all this*, and in order that his church might surpass all others in beauty, *he reduced everything else to ruin.* To tell the truth, *he was mad on the work. He could scarcely tear himself away from it*.[149]

Psellos' view on Romanos' church has less to do with criticising the adoration of images, and more with the ruler's excessive yet superficial piety. From a point of view heavily influenced by his readings of Plato and other philosophers, Psellos labelled Romanos' obsession as excessive and fuelled by greed: too much attention to one element, namely the construction of his church, compromised all of the others. That is not, according to Psellos, the attitude of a balanced spirit. Though the description of the church underlines Romanos' character as inadequate for an emperor, it does not represent an overall rejection of churches as legitimate sacred spaces.

Another example of Psellos' depiction of sacred buildings is the magnificent church elevated by Michael IV Paphlagon. The introduction to the *ekphrasis* of the Hagioi Anargyroi focuses on the emperor's interest in obtaining divine assistance:

> It was now evident that the whole of the emperor's body was swollen, and nobody could fail to notice the hydropsy from which he was suffering. He tried various methods, such as prayers and purifications, in the hope of being cured, but he was confident of ultimate recovery for one reason in particular -- the building of a church in honour of the Anargyroi, in a suburb of the city, on the east side.[150]

It must be noted that the Hagioi Anargyroi, Kosmas and Damian, were doctor saints. The following passage follows after the *ekphrasis* of the church:

> The object of all this was, in some measure, to honour the Deity, but the emperor also hoped to propitiate the 'Servants of God'; perchance they might heal his

[149] *Chronographia* 3.15.21-30, italics mine; ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος φιλοσοφεῖν μὲν ᾔδει ἐν τοῖς ζητήμασιν· … ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἔργων τὸ φιλόσοφον ἐπιδείκνυσθαι, οὐ πάνυ ἠπίστατο. ἀλλὰ δέον, εἴ τι καὶ περὶ τοὺς ἐκτὸς κόσμους παρανομεῖν χρὴ, τῶν τε βασιλείων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι· καὶ κατακοσμεῖν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν· καὶ τὰ διερρωγότα συνάπτειν· πλήρεις τε τοὺς βασιλείους ποιεῖν θησαυροὺς· καὶ στρατιωτικὰ ταῦτα ἡγεῖσθαι τὰ χρήματα. ὁ δὲ, τούτου μὲν ἠμέλει· ὅπως δὲ ὁ ναὸς αὐτῷ καλλίων παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους δεικνύοιτο, τἆλλα κατελυμαίνετο. εἰ δεῖ οὖν καὶ τοῦτ' εἰπεῖν: ἐμεμήνει περὶ τὸ ἔργον· καὶ πολλάκις τοῦτο καὶ πολλοῖς ἐβούλετο ὁρᾶν ὀφθαλμοῖς.

[150] *Chronographia* 4.31.1-5: ὁ δέ γε αὐτοκράτωρ, καὶ προδήλως ἤδη τὸν τοῦ σώματος ὄγκον ἐξώγκωτο· καὶ ὑδεριῶν παντάπασι κατάδηλος ἦν. ὅθεν ἄλλα τε ἀποτρόπαια τοῦ νοσήματος ἐποιήσατο, ἱλασμοῖς χρησάμενος· καὶ καθάρσεσι· καὶ δὴ καὶ ναὸν τοῖς Ἀναργύροις αὐτοῦ που πρὸ τῶν τειχῶν τοῦ Ἄστεως, πρὸς ταῖς ἀνατολαῖς τοῦ ἡλίου, λαμπρὸν ἐδομήσατο.

> affliction. It was all in vain though, for the measure of his life was fulfilled, and his health still continued to break up.[151]

Kaldellis labelled these passages as a more moderate criticism 'for the financial burden imposed on the state'.[152] The project proved to be futile, as Michael died shortly afterwards. Kaldellis concludes: 'in the *Chronographia*, the physical aspects of human nature remain impervious to religious intervention.'[153] I doubt, however, that the intended audience would read the text that way. Despite Psellos' insight into the real aim of Michael's pious works, the description of the church is one of praise for Michael's moderation, and also for the symmetry and harmony of the building.

> So far as the building of sacred churches was concerned, Michael surpassed all his predecessors, both in workmanship and in magnificence. The depths and heights of this edifice were given a new symmetry, and his chapels harmonized with the church to bestow on it an infinite beauty. (…) Besides all this, there were near this church, and practically incorporated into its precincts, lovely baths, numerous fountains, beautiful lawns, and whatever else can delight or attract the eye.[154]

The tone of the *ekphrasis* is one of approval, linked with the concepts of harmony analysed in the previous chapter. The church is said to be located on the east side of Constantinople, and the Greek twice repeats the stem for 'sun' (πρὸς ταῖς ἀνατολαῖς τοῦ ἡλίου), which suggests an encomiastic tone for the building from the very beginning of the description. Not only does

[151] *Chronographia* 4.32.1-5: ἐποίει δὲ ταῦτα, τοῦτο μὲν, καὶ τιμὴν ἀπονέμων τῷ θείῳ· τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ἐξιλεούμενος τοὺς ἐκείνου θεράποντας, ἵν' εἴ πως ἐξῳδηκὸς αὐτοῦ τὸ σπλάγχνον ἰάσωνται. ἀλλ' εἶχε πλέον οὐδὲν, τοῦ μέτρου τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῷ πληρωθέντος· καὶ διαλυομένης αὐτῷ τῆς συνθέσεως.

[152] Kaldellis, *The Argument,* 94, also in 81 and 94; a more fitting interpretation of Psellos' words may be that restoring a building, instead of creating a whole new complex, shows a lack of personal ambition in the supposedly pious action: that is precisely the defect Psellos explicitly criticised in the monastic project of Romanos III; that is also the approach adopted by Nikephoros Phokas' *Novella* from 964 151-16: 'In times gone by when such institutions were not sufficient, the establishment of them was praiseworthy and very useful … But when their number has increased greatly and has become disproportionate to the need and people still turn to the founding of monasteries, how is it impossible not to think that this good is not mixed with evil … who will not say that piety has become a screen for vanity when those who do good, do so in order that they may be seen by all the others?'

[153] Kaldellis, *The Argument,* 94.

[154] *Chronographia* 4.31.10-20: πᾶσαν σχεδὸν τὴν τῶν προλαβόντων βασιλέων περὶ τὰς τῶν ἱερῶν ναῶν δομήσεις ἀποκρύψας χεῖρα καὶ δύναμιν. ἀναλογίαν τε γὰρ τοῖς βάθεσι πρὸς τὰ ὕψη συνήρμοσε· καὶ κάλλος ἀμήχανον τῇ ἁρμονίᾳ τῶν οἰκοδομημάτων προσέπλασε … ἔτι τε λουτρῶν χάριτας· καὶ ἀφθονίαν ὑδάτων· καὶ λειμώνων εὐπρέπειαν· καὶ ὁπόσα ἄλλα τέρπειν οἶδε τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν· καὶ πᾶσαν αἴσθησιν πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον κινεῖν αἰσθητὸν, τούτῳ δὴ τῷ ναῷ συνῆψε καὶ συνεκέρασεν, ἵν' οὕτως εἴπω.

this *ekphrasis* not resemble the previous criticism referred to Romanos' church, but contributes to the overall encomiastic depiction of Michael IV.[155]

The third example of an *ekphrasis* of an ecclesiastic building in the *Chronographia* corresponds to the church of Hagios Georgios erected by Constantine IX, which is presented to the reader as the worst of all the excesses of the emperor. Much like Romanos' church, Constantine's building was never magnificent enough for its patron. Kaldellis again focuses on the statements that 'sandwich' the *ekphrasis*, concluding that Psellos 'disapproved of emperors who spent too much money, or indeed any money at all, on churches and monasteries. Such edifices could not protect the empire from its enemies'.[156]

However, the central section of the *ekphrasis* may prove Psellos' point to be, at least, two-fold. After Constantine tore apart the walls of his church, already under construction, the subsequent building reflected a perfect ideal for Psellos, according to his adherence to harmonic principles. Psellos described the church as surrounded by three concentric circles, each circle containing different kinds of delightful elements. People marvelled at the church's size, symmetry, and harmony, Psellos remarks, 'yet to Constantine all this was but the prelude to the future'.[157]

This grandiose church is later destroyed because it did not please Emperor Constantine. Therefore, Psellos uses the perfection of the building to show how Constantine's obsession distanced him from perfection – a perfection still attainable for Psellos. It materialised, although only for a brief moment, in the Church of Saint George. This perfection, clearly linked to harmony, scaled proportions and the preference for circular forms, is present in what Psellos defines as praiseworthy in his account. Furthermore, the respect for the principles of harmony

[155] *Chronographia* 4.10.
[156] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 68 and 78.
[157] *Chronographia* 6.186-188, quote from 188.1-2: τῷ δέ γε αὐτοκράτορι, ἀρχαὶ τὸ ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὁρωμένων, ἕκαστος ᾤετο.

are present in other sections of the *Chronographia*, such as in the battlefield, as shown previously.[158]

Unlike Kaldellis, I am not convinced that Psellos considered every investment in ecclesiastical monuments a waste that undermined the empire's strength. For Psellos, the principles of perfection that were followed in the intermediate phase of Hagios Georgios, or in the 'harmonious rule' of emperor Michael IV (minus his relatives),[159] could in fact protect the empire from any threat. In the *Chronographia*, a character who displays harmony in his actions, including in his patronage of ecclesiastical buildings, is on the pathway to victory – at least until another disruptive force stands in his way. Some of these characters, namely Basil II and Michael IV, act harmoniously but are not completely aware of the manner in which they are successfully matching with the cosmic principles that effectively rule the world. Just as Basil's austere practices did not spring from any philosophical knowledge, and Michael's piety and dedication rose from his fear to death, what matters in the *Chronographia* is the outcome, not the intentions. Psellos allocates himself in the position of authority to tell us what worked from among the imperial policies – hence Psellos' applause for Michael's building and *ethos*, despite the fact that he died without consolation.[160]

Like the description of other characters, landscapes, and events, the description of religious buildings becomes a literary tool for Psellos to remind the reader of the true values to which the ruler should adhere.[161] Those principles, though deeply related to neo-platonic

[158] As shown in note 131 from chapter four, on page 174, Psellos uses the motif of concentric spheres in works such as his second letter to the later patriarch Xiphilinos, arguing that the pursuit of knowledge is to cross over the concentric circles of wisdom until attaining illumination.
[159] *Chronographia* 4.7: Psellos defines Michael as 'entirely devoid of Hellenic culture; on the other hand, he was more harmonious in his nature than the philosophers who professed that culture'.
[160] Here I agree with Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 51 and 152: Psellos considers the ideal king-philosopher to be non-existent during his time, so he proposes himself as a necessary advisor for emperors; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*, 139-140, also discussed how Psellos' idealised image of Basil as a man devoid of philosophical interests does not match with the information we gather from other sources.
[161] See also F. Lauritzen, 'Stethatos' Paradise in Psellos' ekphrasis of Mt Olympos (Orat. min. 36 Littlewood)', *VV* 70 (2011) 139-150; Miles agreed with him in G. Miles, 'Psellos and his Traditions', in S. Mariev (ed.), *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism* (Boston, MA and Berlin 2017) 79-102.

readings, are only to an extent at odds with the Christian codes of behaviour contemporary to Psellos.

5.3. The body as a space

From the danger of the lands outside the city to the delights at court, and from the ruthless battlefield to the inner spaces of a church: so far we have seen that spatial context matters in the narratives analysed. For the last section of this chapter, the body itself will be analysed as a literary space. However, ranking the body alongside the depiction of a church or a battlefield may at first seem counterintuitive. If the body is conceived as the 'I' surrounded by space, how can the body also be understood as a space?

The answer to this question lies in the complex nature of both language and human experience. There is not a single approach to what the body is, either in Medieval Greek or in Modern English. On occasions, both in Byzantium and nowadays, people regard the body as something else than a unitary self. Both Classical, Christian and Byzantine intellectuals mapped the body, so each one of its compounding parts plays a role within a hierarchy. Then the body is no longer a unitary self, but a combination of elements. By describing the different elements within a given character's body, just as other spaces were described, the narrator can make a point about the character's morality and behaviour. Within Byzantine culture, organs such as the heart become the common receptacle of the higher ideals,[162] while the belly 'encapsulates the ideas of bestiality, irrational urges, filth, danger and evil, and serves as an emblem of the individuals who pose a serious threat to social, political as well as religious orders'.[163] Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria admonished individuals whose life

[162] *History* 314/241.28-29: envy seizes the heart in this passage, which is understood as the takeover of the inner, naturally benign part of the body.
[163] I thank T. Labuk for sharing his unpublished paper 'Belly (γαστήρ) as the Space of Savagery in Byzantine Literature from the Eleventh to Twelfth Century' from the conference *From the Human to the Universe: Spatialities of Byzantine Culture* (Uppsala 18–21 May 2017).

is ‘nothing more than the belly’; putting them on the level of irrational creatures.[164] In describing Constantine IX Monomachos, Attaleiates mentioned the emperor’s enjoyment of several indulgences: ‘things that are inseparable from, in fact rooted in the lower, corporeal part of the soul (ψυχὴ)’.[165] Attaleiates also describes anger as something that ‘at its peak, takes over the heart like fire’.[166] Therefore, both in the *History* and in the other accounts analysed, alluding to the primacy of one part of the self over the other leads to a moral judgment. Thus the body stops being perceived as a homogeneous ‘I’ and becomes a landscape whose description interacts with the political discourse of the narrative.

The body can also be interpreted as the physical carcass of the soul. Michael Psellos discusses this in his *Opera Minora*. Here Psellos described the human as a sphynx, half rational and half animal; Psellos may be following Plotinos, who argued that humans are set in the frontier between ascension towards the intellect or dwelling in the appearances of the sensible world. Psellos argues to Xiphilinos that the soul, just like the body, can be divided, but (irrational) emotions arise in the guts – thus he called his literary enemy Sabaite ‘slave of the belly’.[167] In the *Chronographia* itself, Psellos mentions this matter in passing, recounting the philosophical debates he and Constantine Monomachos used to hold:

> I would prove to him how the soul can be visible in the body, and again, how it can float above the body, like a cork, but still attached to it: this phenomenon I compared to some object, suspended in the air, balancing itself lightly on the wing,

[164] Clem. Alex., *Paedagogus* 2.1.1.4: Οἱ μὲν δὴ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι ζῶσιν, ἵνα ἀσθίωσιν, ὥσπερ ἀμέλει καὶ τὰ ἄλογα ζῷα, οἷς οὐδὲν ἀλλ' ἢ γαστήρ ἐστιν ὁ βίος. I thank Tomek Labuk for this reference.

[165] *History* 47/38.13-15: Ἔμελλε δ’ αὐτῷ καὶ ἀστεϊσμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν μίμοις γελοιασμῶν καὶ τῆς ἐπικαίρου ῥαστώνης καὶ οἷς ἡ ζωτικὴ ψυχὴ συνέζευκταί τε καὶ συνερρίζωται.

[166] *History* 314/241.28-29: ὡς ἡ ἀκμὴ τοῦ θυμοῦ, πυρὸς δίκην τὴν καρδίαν αὐτὴν κατανεμομένη.

[167] Michael Psellos, *Philosophica Minora,* vol. 1, 22; also Michael Psellos, *Letter KD 191* 215-218; A. del Campo Echevarría, *La teoría platónica de las ideas en Bizancio (siglos IX-XI)* (Madrid 2012) 213; G. Miles, ‘Psellos and His Traditions’, 87; E. Delli, ‘Entre compilation et originalité: le corps pneumatique dans l'oeuvre de Michel Psellos’, in C. Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2007) 211-229; as Charles Barber argued, for Psellos ‘a man is a being that occupies the middle ground between the intellectual and the material domains, participating in both’: C. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2007) 63-64; see also D. Jenkins, ‘Psellos’ Conceptual Precision’, in C. Barber and D. Jenkins, *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden 2006) 131-151; G. Miles, ‘Living as a Sphinx: Composite Being and Monstruous Interpreter in the ‘Middle Life’ of Michael Psellos’, in D. Kambaskovic-Sawers (ed.), *Conjunctions: Body and Mind from Plato to the Enlightenment* (Dordrecht 2014) 11-24.

> relying entirely on its own strength and altogether unaffected by the weight of the bond that ties it to something else below it.[168]

Psellos' words represent one of the few occasions when the historical accounts analysed stop the flow of the narrative and take a seat to debate this matter. The 'man who surpassed all our contemporaries in knowledge'[169] surely was expected by his audience to introduce some glimpses into his high views on diverse matters while recounting past events. However, for the most part, the practice of history writing in the eleventh century seemed to rely on general conventions concerning the division between body and soul, unless other goals required further explanation. Beyond Psellos' philosophical discussions, evidence from other accounts show that body and soul could be conceived separately. In his study on early Christian approaches to the body, Peter Brown noted how new views 'tend to prise the human person loose from the physical world'; 'what kept humans pure had nothing to do with their bodies: it was the subtle, impalpable flow within the will'.[170] From that perspective, the excessive care, or the lack of it, to one's own body could provide a decisive measure of the character's moral strength. Exposing one's own body for the sake of the community, a task generally accomplished in the frontier as discussed above, is argued by the narrators as a proof of the characters' ideal personality. Attaleiates praised the generals from Ancient Rome because of their exposition to danger for the sake of their πατρίς ('country').[171]

Naturally, several approaches to the body coexist within our accounts. Psellos recalls Michael IV's disease from the perspective of a physical challenge that this character overcame, but referred to Constantine IX's state of putrefaction as at best a shameful sight, at worst, a parodic feature.[172] The multiplicity of approaches to the body and the lack of explicit qualifiers

[168] *Chronographia* 6.197.19-22: καὶ ψυχῆς, δεικνὺς τί μὲν το φερόμενον ταύτης <ἐν> τῷ σώματι· τί δὲ τὸ δίκην φελλοῦ ἀκρόπλουν ἐπιθιγγάνον τῇ πέδῃ, οἷον ἄρτημα κορυφαῖον τῷ κούφῳ πτερῷ, μένον ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ μόνον· καὶ μὴ συμπιεζόμενον τῷ δεσμῷ.
[169] *History* 21/17.26-27: ἄνδρα τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς διαφέροντα γνώσει.
[170] P. Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, NY and Chichester 2008 [1988]) 432, 434.
[171] *History* 195/150.32-151.1.
[172] *Chronographia* 4.42-43 and 6.106.

sometimes led to ambiguity, both for modern readers and, in few quantifiable occasions, for the intended audience. That is the case in Attaleiates' account of the miracle surrounding Isaak Komnenos' body, which was covered in moisture after his death.[173] Attaleiates recognised that the moisture was probably a sign, yet an ambiguous one. However, in this case the ambiguity is only feigned. Attaleiates lays a number of clues in the narration preceding the miracle, so the sign can be read, almost unequivocally, as proof of divine punishment. Yet the story does not end here. The *Continuation* of Skylitzes incorporates the miracle into a substantially different narration of Isaak's life, which culminates with his good deeds as a member of a monastery. For the reader of the *Continuation*, however, the moisture described in the *History* of Attaleiates has had its meaning changed. Since Isaak is represented by Skylitzes as sincerely repenting for his sins before his death, the moisture's meaning could be read as an authentically ambiguous sign.[174]

In our narratives, bodily depiction, though at times brief and heavily dependent on the intertextual web shared between narrator and audience, played a decisive role. Our narrators made their judgments of our characters clear by describing their bodies. For example, Romanos IV's mistake in trusting a Turk is underscored by Attaleiates' description of the Turk as an ugly, deformed being.[175] Also, Attaleiates proves Botaneiates' familial relation with Nikephoros Phokas by arguing that an image of the latter emperor resembled the former ruler.[176]

[173] *History* 69-70/55.18-56.10.
[174] *Continuation* 109.19-110.5; a more detailed comparison between the *History* and the *Continuation* concerning their representation of Isaak's reign will follow in pages 287-296.
[175] *History* 142/110.28-30.
[176] *History* 228/176.6-9.

5.3.1. Self-denial and the political significance of maggots.

A frequent use of body depiction, and its relation to the political discourse in the narratives studied, is related to the basic opposition between characters able to expose themselves for different reasons, and those who can not. Such a dichotomy is often connected to the separation between those who ventured to the frontier, and those who stayed in the capital; inside the battle, some fight and expose themselves to bodily harm. In terms of body depiction, a narrator can stress the bodily punishment of a given character, and the attitude of the person suffering, to make a point about the character's personality.

Attaleiates' *History* contains examples of bodily punishment in the battlefield. During the account of the early Pecheneg raids, the narrator establishes the *magistros* Arrianites as a praiseworthy character. He first does his best as advisor to the foolish general, the eunuch Constantine the *praipositos*, who is held responsible for the Roman defeat. Once the battle was lost, Arrianites was brought into the company of the Skythian general as a prisoner. There he committed a last heroic action, striking the Skythian leader with a sword.

> The Skythians then were inflamed with wrath and cut him to pieces. Slitting open his belly they pulled out his guts and replaced them with his hands and feet, which they cut off for the purpose. He, then, died a noble death.[177]

Attaleiates adds a detailed description of Arrianites' mutilation to qualify the brave, selfless element of his action. In this case, the *magistros* represents a symbolic ancestor of Attaleiates himself through his position and title. Therefore, Attaleiates portrayed himself as the successor of martyrs and smart, loyal advisors.[178]

[177] *History* 34/28.15-18: οἱ δὲ Σκύθαι θυμῷ ζέσαντες, διασπαράττουσι τοῦτον· καὶ τὴν γαστέρα τεμόντες τὰ ἔγκατα τούτου ἐξαιροῦσι καὶ κατατεμόντες αὐτοῦ χεῖρας καὶ πόδας ἀντεισάγουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ θνήσκει λοιπὸν τὸν εὐγενῆ θάνατον.
[178] See pages 130-134.

Michael IV is also praised in the *History*, with regard to his decision to lead the campaign against the Bulgarians despite his illness.[179] Psellos, who dedicated a more detailed and positive account of Michael's reign than Attaleiates, invested no few words in highlighting the emperor's decision as a praiseworthy preference for the higher ideals over the pains emanating from his body, and from the protests from his own relatives:

> As soon as the news became known to him, and actually before the full account was received, he determined to carry the war to the Bulgarians …. It was extremely disappointing – he emphasized this point – if his reign was not only destined to witness no aggrandizement of the Roman Empire, but actually some loss of territory. He suspected that he was personally responsible, before God and man, if, after what had occurred, he should through any carelessness on his own part, allow the Bulgarians to secede with impunity.[180]

A famous example of this approach to characters' bodily pain in eleventh-century narratives is the highly-dramatic account of the emperor Romanos IV's blinding, as described in the *History* of Attaleiates. In this last stage of Romanos' reign, once the emperor is captured by soldiers loyal to Michael VII, Attaleiates represents the character as a victim of unjust suffering:

> Such was the reward that he had received for his earlier imperial splendour and glory that reached to the heavens, or rather for doing noble deeds on behalf of the Romans. He was led on a wretched beast of burden as far as the Propontis, dragged along like a rotting corpse with his eyes gouged out, his head and face swollen up and maggots were visibly dropping off. A few days later he died in excruciating pain (…). Romanos left to posterity a record of sufferings exceeding those of Job, but the most amazing and at the same noble thing for which he is remembered is that throughout all these enormous trials and unparalleled evils he never uttered a blasphemous or petty word but always gave thanks and asked to spend more time in misfortune simply in order, as he put it, to please his Maker by traversing the path of asceticism in an even more challenging way.[181]

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[179] *History* 9-10/8.1-21.

[180] *Chronographia* 4.42.1-12: ὡς γὰρ ἠκηκόει τὸ πρᾶγμα, ἐβουλήθη μὲν εὐθὺς πρὶν ἢ τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀγγελίας πέρας λαβεῖν, πόλεμόν τε κατ' ἐκείνων ἐξενεγκέσθαι· καὶ αὐτὸς τῆς ὅλης προΐστασθαι παρατάξεως …. δεινὸν γὰρ ἐποιεῖτο, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνος εἰώθει λέγειν, εἰ μηδέν τι προσθείη τῇ βασιλείᾳ Ῥωμαίων, μέρος τι ταύτης ἀφαιρεθείη· εὐθύνεσθαί τε καὶ παρ' ἀνθρώποις ὑπώπτευε· καὶ παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ, εἰ ἐπιρρᾳθυμήσας τῷ γεγονότι, ἐθελοντὴς ὥσπερ παραχωρήσοι Βουλγάροις τῆς ἀποστασίας Ῥωμαίων.

[181] *History* 179/138.11-139.4: τότε δὲ τοῖς ὅπλοις ἀπαγορεύων καὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς ἐκείνης λαμπρότητος καὶ τῆς μέχρις οὐρανοῦ φθανούσης δόξης, μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς ὑπὲρ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀνδραγαθίας τοιαῦτα κομισάμενος τὰ ἐπίχειρα …. μνήμην δὲ καταλιπὼν τοῖς μετέπειτα τῶν τοῦ Ἰὼβ ἐκείνου δυστυχημάτων ὑπερβαίνουσαν τὴν ἀκρόασιν, τοῦτο δὲ θαυμασιώτατον ἅμα καὶ γενναιότατον τοῖς πᾶσι διήγημα καταλέλοιπεν, ὅτι ἐπὶ τοῖς τηλικούτοις πειρασμοῖς καὶ ἀπαραμίλλοις κακοῖς οὐδὲν βλάσφημον ἢ μικρόψυχον ἀπεφθέγξατο, ἀλλ' εὐχαριστῶν διετέλει καὶ χρόνων προσθήκην ἐπιζητῶν ἐν κακοῖς ἵνα εὐαρεστήσῃ, φησί, τῷ ποιήσαντι, τὸν τῆς ἀσκήσεως δρόμον διανύων ἐπιπονώτερον.

Romanos' suffering has been labelled by Pérez Martín as one of the climaxes of the *History*.[182] However, I have already noted in previous chapters how the narration quoted above is no longer focused on Romanos as a character. These lines are destined to raise criticism against Michael VII, the major tyrant of the *History*, and the man behind the blinding.[183] Just as Isaak Komnenos had been blamed in earlier sections of the *History* for slaughtering Romans in a civil war, and for banishing the Patriarch Keroularios, Michael is blamed for excessive violence to a man who was worthy of praise. Therefore a tyrant is constructed in the *History* by depicting the maltreated body of one of his subjects. On top of this, Romanos' resilience in the face of extreme pain and injustice is praised. After his defeat at Manzikert, and his later unsuccessful struggle to recover his position at the head of the empire, Romanos becomes the lord of nothing but his own body. Then the last proof of his ideal character is based on how he ruled over that last piece of his formerly vast earthly dominion.

The *Synopsis* of Skylitzes, for the most part, seems to connect much of the reigns of Constantine VIII, Romanos III, and Michael IV under relatively consistent arches: the first ruler is depicted as a tyrant. He is followed by a mildly benign Romanos, who is murdered by the latter emperor and his brother, the eunuch John Orphanotrophos. Violence is tangential to the characterisation of the three reigns: while Constantine's account is filled by a list of people violently punished by the sovereign,[184] Romanos' reign contains an equally vast list of people who received his benefactions. This contrast becomes more explicit when the narrator mentions people punished by Constantine, now being rewarded by the new ruler.[185] Romanos is repairing

[182] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xliii.
[183] This matter has been discussed on pages 88-92 above.
[184] *Synopsis* 371.42-372.91. It has been argued that Constantine's negative depiction was rooted in Skylitzes' support to the Komnenian family. The peak of Constantine's illegitimate cruelty in the account focused in fact on the blinding of Nikephoros Komnenos: K.P. Todt, 'Herrscher im Schatten: Konstantin VIII. (960/961-1028)', *Thetis* 7 (2000) 93-105.
[185] *Synopsis* 376.72-76.

the harm committed by Constantine. Good weather and prosperity in the land were noted that year, which we can probably read as a proof of divine favour for the ruler's policies.[186]

Exerting unjustified violence against the subjects' body is deemed impious and reveals a character's inadequacy to rule. After all, as Attaleiates explains, the body has been provided by God to each individual: consequently, the emperor's mismanagement of his subject's bodies constitutes an act of impiety.[187] Attaleiates blames Emperor Michael VII for blinding Romanos, among other reasons, because he deprived Romanos of the light and 'the power of visual perception *that was given to him by God'*.[188] For Attaleiates, there is something of the sacred space in each individual's body. Attaleiates further explained the ideal procedure that an emperor should follow against rebellious subjects when praising Botaneiates' laws, which supposedly prevented unfair violence from emperors against their subjects.[189] Attaleiates argued for the repression of an emperor's anger as a matter of φιλανθρωπία.[190] Only after some time, when the need to decree corporal punishment for the common good becomes clear, is violence justified. Botaneiates' blinding of Bryennios is excused as a matter of protecting the empire's stability. [191] Other rebels were pardoned, Attaleiates added, which was 'something that made him equal to God himself'.[192] Botaneiates also blinded the rebellious Basilakes. The rebel's situation is then described as 'pitiable' (ἐλεεινὸς), but then Attaleiates reminds us of Botaneiates' piety and munificence to the rest of his subjects.[193]

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[186] *Synopsis* 376.77-82.
[187] *History* 196/152.4-6.
[188] *History* 176/136.14-16: Ἀποστερηθῆναι καὶ αὐτοῦ φωτὸς καὶ τῆς δεδομένης αὐτῷ θεόθεν τῶν ὁρωμένων κατανοήσεως τίνα; italics are mine: see note 112 in this chapter for an earlier commentary on this line.
[189] *History* 313-315/240.12-242.23.
[190] It is noteworthy how present the word φιλανθρωπία is in Attaleiates' speech. He began the section by underlining this word, linked to the ruler: Φιλάνθρωπος δὲ ὤν ἐς τὸ ἄγαν ὁ βασιλεύς…: *History* 313/240.12; again, when the declamation moves from describing the situation prior to the law to the description of Botaneiates' measure itself, the sentence begins with Ὁ δὲ φιλάνθρωπότατος οὑτοσὶ βασιλεὺς ἀφορμὰς φιλανθρωπίας εὑρίσκειν βουλόμενος...: *History* 314/241.12.
[191] *History* 292/224.14-21. Immediately afterwards, Botaneiates is represented lecturing Bryennios on the impiety of the latter's rebellion: *History* 292-293/224.25-225.23.
[192] *History* 293/225.28-226.1: Ἕτερον δὲ οὐδένα τῶν ἄλλων δι' αἵματος ἠνέσχετο τιμωρῆσαι ὁ βασιλεύς, ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον ἰσόθεον πρᾶγμα πεοπίηκε.
[193] *History* 300/230.30-231.7.

Exerting violence over the subjects' bodies is not only condemned when it leads to death or mutilation. Another kind of condemnable, tyrannical violence, is forcing a given subject to become a monk. Attaleiates' lament on the current state of the Roman Empire, in comparison with the traditions of Ancient Rome, begins with the triggering depiction of the *kaisar* John Doukas, arriving at the capital dressed as a monk. The *kaisar* had been proclaimed emperor by Rouselios, so he was now a potential menace to Michael. Therefore, he decided to change his secular garb and hairstyle (μετὰ κοσμικῆς τῆς περιβολῆς… τὴν κοσμικὴν ἀποβαλόμενος τρίχα) and meet the emperor dressed as a monk, 'in humble attire' (ἐν εὐτελεῖ τῷ σχήματι), something that astonished the audience and made Attaleiates, as he recounts, reflect on the disgraceful situation, which was the complete opposite to the earlier triumphal processions from Ancient Rome.[194]

Attaleiates shows the importance of clothing and hair as leading attributes of an individual's identity and prestige. When these attributes are stripped away unjustly, the government strays further from the divine, ideal rule. The *kaisar* John's episode is not the only case in the *History*: Romanos IV Diogenes, once captured by the supporters of Michael VII was forced to divest himself of his imperial garments and to shear his secular hair, something that inspired fear and piety among the onlookers.[195] Towards the end of Romanos III Argyros' reign, Skylitzes mentioned how John Orphanotrophos gave the emperor a poison that caused his beard and hair to fall out: a marker of ideal masculinity lost by the ingestion of a poison administered by one who was beardless himself.[196]

All in all, the measure of the vileness of an emperor seems to rely on the attention paid to how much, and how badly, he harmed his subjects. From that point of view, any close-up of

[194] *History* 193-194/149.12-28.
[195] *History* 174-175/135.2-19. These elements can be connected with the importance of certain traits of masculinity and imperial power, studied on pages 153-167.
[196] *Synopsis* 389.67-390.76.

the punished body, either meaning mutilation or deformation of his former, ideal image, serves as a reminder of the evil character behind the crime.

5.3.2. Living in a material world? Psellos' harmonious body

The examples discussed above show different possibilities in which a character's morality is reflected in the depiction of his (in these cases) body. In the *Chronographia*, Psellos approaches this correlation between the two objects in a slightly different way, often focusing on the principle of platonic harmony already discussed in previous chapters.[197] That being the case, to what extent do Psellos' bodily depictions differ from those of Attaleiates and Skylitzes?

As in other cases, previous scholars have focused on Psellos' original *ekphrasis* of his different characters in the story, but often framed that originality under modern standards, such as the author's desire to express his originality, a focus on a teleological view of the declining Byzantium, or the recurrent exploration for the *Chronographia*'s subversive meaning. Scholars such as Dimosthenous, Jouanno, and Papaioannou presents as an innovative aspect of Psellos' thought his focus on corporeal features (even of saintly figures) and his requirement of a beautiful body for attaining personal perfection.[198] In his analysis of the *Chronographia*, Kaldellis labelled Psellos' approach to the body as a new ascetic model for the ideal emperor, labelled as 'imperial *askesis*' and significantly different from that one promoted by the church dogma.[199] According to Kaldellis, Psellos' use of rather traditional approaches to the body, such as Michael IV's resilience to disease, are hiding a more radical message, only related to Platonism up to a point, disregarding the 'mystical mentality' of Neoplatonic philosophers and

[197] See pages 171-178 above.
[198] A.A. Dimosthenous, *Ιδεολογία και φαντασία στο Βυζάντιο: Μελέτες ανθρωπολογίας και ιστορίας των νοοτροπιών μέσα από τη Βυζαντινή γραμματεία* (Nicosia 2006) 45-46: 'στο Βυζάντιο πολλοί εκμεταλλεύτηκαν την ομορφιά του λειτουργώντας πραγματικά ως ζιγκολό'; S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013), esp. 153-158; on this aspect, Jouanno alluded to physiognomic literature, in order to explain how, for Psellos, beauty marks morality: C. Jouanno, 'Le corps du prince dans la Chronographie de Michael Psellos', *Kentron* 19 (2003) 205-221; Aristotle, *Physiognomika*, ed. R. Förster, *Scriptores physiognomonici graeci et latini*, vol. 1 (Leipzig 1893) 72.
[199] Kaldellis *The Argument*, 51-61.

closer to 'sensorial experience, the body, and material reality in general'.[200] In the case of Michael IV's account, Kaldellis stresses Psellos' satirising view of Michael's too great trust in monks to cure his disease, which ultimately proved to be ineffective.[201]

However, I do not see satire in Psellos' account of Michael IV. In my view, Psellos is open to using a wide variety of elements in his account, from rather traditional approaches to the body – as the examples shown above – to elements not common in historical accounts. Nevertheless, the ways in which I think Psellos innovates in his views on the body are less related to a cultural 'jump forward',[202] and more to the narrator's Neoplatonic beliefs and the principle of harmony. In previous sections I discussed the importance of geometrical, luminous elements to underline a character's legitimacy, as was the case for Isaak I Komnenos.[203] Psellos also includes such elements in the description of rulers such as Basil II. Basil's face 'was rounded off, as if from the centre into a perfect circle',[204] while his beard 'went bald, but the hair from his cheeks poured down, (…) so that wound round on both sides it was made into a perfect circle and he appeared to possess a full beard'.[205] For Psellos, stressing the emperor's circular patterns in his description means evoking the ideal perfection and harmony.[206]

Psellos also characterises his account by an in-depth attention to imperial diseases, which opens the space wide for the narrator to talk about the body of the sovereign. Psellos often allocates descriptions of the ruler's diseases to the end of each chapter. When Psellos suggested

[200] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 5-7; other researchers have made a similar case, albeit from a substantially different perspective: Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, esp. 153-158.
[201] Kaldellis 1999, 80-89.
[202] See pages 42-58 above for a broader discussion.
[203] *Chronographia* 7.22-26.
[204] *Chronographia* 1.35.7-8: τὸ δὲ πρόσωπον ξύμπαν, ὥσπερ ἀπὸ κέντρου ἐς ἀκριβῆ κύκλον ἀποτετόρνευτο. Psellos also refers to other characters in similar way, as it is the case of Constantine Monomachos: *Chronographia* 6.125-126; or Constantine, Michael VII's son: *Chronographia* 7c.12.7; Constantine's hair is also covered with golden hair: *Chronographia* 7c.12.13.
[205] *Chronographia* 1.36.11-13: τὸ δ' ὅσον ἀπὸ τῆς γένυος κατακέχυτο, δασεῖα τὲ ἡ θρὶξ ἐγεγόνει· καὶ πολλὴ πέριξ περιεπεφύκει. ὅθεν καὶ ἑκατέρωθεν περιελιχθεῖσα, ἐς κύκλον ἀπηκριβώθη· καὶ ἐδόκει πάντοθεν γενειάσκειν.
[206] Other elements of Basil's depiction present his traits as not tending to neither of two excesses, but keeping a fair middle position: *Chronographia* 1.35-36.

that Romanos III was poisoned, in addition to being drowned in the imperial baths, he described in detail first the physical deterioration of Romanos' body, and then the emperor's last moments alive.[207] As was mentioned above, the same applies to Michael IV, who suffered from hydropsy.[208] Psellos' book on reign of Constantine Monomachos included depictions of the bodily corruption and ultimate death for the empresses Zoe and Theodora.[209] Finally, Psellos' attention to the body, and disease, occupies much of his account of Isaak Komnenos' reign.[210]

The first lengthy publication focused on Psellos' treatment of imperial depictions and diseases was the article by Corinne Jouanno.[211] She noted Psellos' unusual attention to diseases, and offered some hypotheses on why this was the case. Firstly, Jouanno pointed to Psellos' closeness to different emperors and his knowledge of medicine: the author is showing off.[212] I do not disagree completely with this idea: as mentioned in previous sections, Psellos uses every opportunity to remind the audience of his privileged position and wisdom. He can do so and, to some extent, it is expected that he will remind the audience of his extensive knowledge. Psellos' knowledge of medicine only further consolidated his fame as a man of talent. About a century later, Anna Komnene will place herself in a similar situation when describing the death of her father, mastering the combination of lament and medical examination at once.[213] Jouanno further explained Psellos' interest in diseases by alluding to the author's personal 'fascination' with the matter.[214]

[207] *Chronographia* 3.24-26; Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 30 also argued that Psellos' depiction of Romanos' body at the end of his reign symbolised his overall incapacity to rule.
[208] *Chronographia* 4.43 and 50-55.
[209] *Chronographia* 6.125-131; the account on Zoe's illness follows in 6.160; Constantine's fatal illness followed Psellos' depiction of his excessive bodily indulgence (because of Psellos' absence from court) in 6.202-203; Theodora's death is described in in 6b.19-20.
[210] *Chronographia* 7.74-88.
[211] C. Jouanno, 'Le corps', 205-221; see R. Volk, *Der medizinsche Inhalt der Schriften des Michael Psellos* (Munich, 1990).
[212] Jouanno, 'Le corps', 209.
[213] Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 15.11.
[214] Jouanno, 'Le corps', 209-210.

My disagreement with Jouanno mostly comes from the separation established in her publication between 'religious interpretations' of diseases, and the lack of such interpretations, that is to say, a proto-secularised approach to illnesses.[215] Jouanno assigns Psellos to the second category: the author focused 'on the very human sufferings of sick emperors'.[216] Thus Jouanno missed the highly symbolic elements conveyed in the descriptions, which are rooted in Psellos' system of beliefs.

Jouanno only noted Psellos' metaphoric connection between the emperor's body and the empire, after Psellos himself stated this connection explicitly in the seventh book of the *Chronographia*. That is, in my opinion, the main impetus for Psellos' attention to imperial diseases throughout the book. Not only does Psellos recount all the chronological period covered by the *Chronographia* as the growth of a disease in the state, but Isaak's body is compared with the body of the state:

> Here then we have the first crisis. The greater part of the nation had been changed from men into beasts. They had been fattened up to such an extent that it was necessary to administer purgative drugs, and that in considerable doses. A second course of treatment was demanded -- I mean, of course, surgical operations, cauterization, and cathartics. The opportunity for healing recurred and Isaak Komnenos, wearing his crown, climbed into the Roman chariot. In order that we may consider him, too, in the light of allegory, let us liken his position partly to that of a charioteer, partly to that of a doctor.[217]

As the empire decays due to Isaak's unsuccessful reforms, so does the emperor's body:

> He wanted to see the sick body restored to health immediately. What with his burning and cutting here, and his mighty pulling and tugging with the reins on his runaway horses there, he somehow or other failed to notice that he himself had

[215] Jouanno, 'Le corps', 212-213.

[216] Jouanno, 'Le corps', 213; in response to Jouanno's words, C. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting*, 64, on Psellos' depiction of the two-folded nature of humankind: 'for Psellos, to be truthful to this twofold nature, spiritual experience must embrace them both … This is not a purely material thing. Rather, the assaults on its evident materiality disclose the invisible intellextual aspect of man'.

[217] *Chronographia* 7.57.1-9: ὁ μὲν οὖν πρῶτος καιρὸς οὗτος, ὃς δὴ θῆρας τοὺς πλείους ἀντ' ἀνθρώπων πεποιηκὼς· καὶ τοσοῦτον ὑπερπιάνας, ὡς δεῖσθαι φαρμάκων καθαρσίων πολλῶν, τὴν ἑτέραν ἐζήτει διαδοχὴν, φημὶ δὴ τὴν τῆς τομῆς· καὶ τοῦ καυτῆρος· καὶ τῆς καθάρσεως. ἐπανεληλύθει τοιγαροῦν καὶ οὗτος· καὶ ὁ Κομνηνὸς Ἰσαάκιος ἐπὶ τὸν Ῥωμαϊκὸν ἄνεισι μετὰ τοῦ διαδήματος ἅξονα, καὶ ἵνα δὴ καὶ τοῦτον τῇ διὰ τῶν ἀλληγοριῶν ἐναργείᾳ κατανοήσωμεν, νῦν μὲν εἰς ἡνίοχον θείημεν, νῦν δὲ τοῖς ἀσκληπιάδαις καταριθμήσωμεν.

> caught the disease before he got control over these troubles and restored them to order.[218]

Psellos explicitly divided his account of Isaak's reign into three diseases: the former crisis in the empire (explained in 7.44-57), the unsuccessful attempt by Isaak to ameliorate the situation (7.57-74), and finally the disease of the emperor himself (7.74-92). Each one of these three sections occupies approximately the same space in the narrative. Although this proportion is not exact, it may highlight the important role Psellos gave to diseases in organising his narration internally.

Furthermore, the emperor's disease is described in remarkably similar terms to his problematic reforms. The core of Psellos' criticism to the reforms implemented by Isaak relied on their quick pace:

> Quietly and without attracting attention like the Creator in Plato, this man who, like him, had inherited a world – in his case the world of politics – in a state of flux, without harmony, without order, then he too, I affirm, would have brought it back from chaos to calm, and he too would have introduced real harmony into the affairs of state. God is described by Moses, the leader of His people, as creating the universe in six days, but if Isaak did not complete his whole task in a single day, he reckoned the failure intolerable.[219]

Even Isaak's hunting practices, the element that is pointed out as the direct cause for his disease, having to do with Isaak's constant (πολλάκις) throwing of spears and the repeated (συνεχῶς) strain on his right arm.[220] Similarly, Isaak's disease is characterised by not letting the emperor have time to rest. The overlap between the two imperial bodies thus reaches a zenith, and takes the emperor's life:

> They do say that Cato, when he was in a fever or suffering from some other illness, used to remain completely motionless and still (διαμένειν καὶ ἄτρεπτον), resting

[218] *Chronographia* 7.58.10-15: ὁ δὲ βουλόμενος ἀθρόον εὐθυφορούμενον μὲν ἰδεῖν τὸ πρότερον <ἀτάκτως φερόμενον ἅρμα>· εἵς τε τὴν φυσικὴν ζωὴν τὸ παρὰ φύσιν γεγενημένον σῶμα μετενεχθῆναι· καὶ τοῦτο μὲν καίων καὶ τέμνων· τοὺς δέ γε ἀτάκτως θέοντας ἵππους πολλοῖς χαλινοῖς ἀνείργων καὶ ἀνασειράζων, ἔλαθέ πως διαφθαρεὶς πρότερον· ἢ ἐκεῖνα τάξας καὶ καταστήσας.

[219] *Chronographia* 7.62.4-10: καὶ οὕτω λανθάνων τοῦ κακοῦ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν, προΐει κατὰ βραχὺ, ὥσπερ δὴ καὶ ὁ παρὰ Πλάτωνι δημιουργὸς, παραλαβὼν καὶ οὗτος τὸν τῆς πολιτείας κόσμον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως κινούμενον, εἰς τάξιν τε ἂν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας μετήγαγεν· καὶ κόσμον ὡς ἀληθῶς τοῖς πράγμασιν εἰσεποίησεν. ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν Θεὸς τῷ δημαγωγῷ Μωϋσῇ εἰσῆκται, ἐν ἓξ ἡμέραις τὸν κόσμον δημιουργῶν· ἐκεῖνος δὲ, εἰ μὴ αὐθημερὸν πάντα ποιήσειεν, οὐκ ἀνεκτὸν ἐλογίζετο.

[220] *Chronographia* 7.73.

> until the attack passed and the state of his health took a change for the better. Isaak, however, unlike Cato, kept altering the position of his body (διεποικίλλετο τῷ σώματι) and twisting about (ἐστρέφετο). His breathing was quicker, and laboured. Nature (ἡ φύσις) gave him no respite (ἀνακωχὴν) whatever.[221]

Jouanno concluded her article with this example of Isaak's disease. She further argued that Psellos' 'morbid fascination' was rooted in the author's disappointment with the state of affairs in the empire, and the absence of a capable ruler who would solve the situation properly.[222] This is indeed the impression one is led to if we focus exclusively on the diseases and the ends of each emperor's account, but what about the rest of the narrative? Jouanno did not consider, for example, the triumphant note of Isaak's arrival to power, in the company of Psellos himself. A superficial panegyric perhaps? That has been the distinction made by a number of authors on the *History* of Attaleiates, giving prominence to the author's criticism of the situation, and labelling Botaneiates' panegyric as insincere.[223] However, with respect to the *Chronographia*, Kaldellis himself brought Isaak's ascension to the throne as the positive climax of the book. Psellos' happiness is sincere, Kaldellis argues, for a perfect ruler has ascended to the throne escorted by the ultimate philosopher – himself![224] Therefore, we may wonder, is Psellos writing from the position of the enthusiastic supporter of Isaak, or as a disappointed critic of the imperial policies?

Psellos' early enthusiasm for Isaak's enthronement is no more authentic, or profound for the argument of the book, than his later disappointment. Just as Psellos moves across genres and themes in the *Chronographia* in order to portray reality from different angles, his treatment of the diseases usually corresponds to the moment of the narrative where Psellos underlines the failures of the ruler. Just as Psellos repeatedly labels Romanos III's policy and inner character

[221] *Chronographia* 7.75.5-9: Τὸν μὲν οὖν Κάτωνά φασι πυρέττοντα· ἤ τινι ἄλλῳ κατεσχημένον νοσήματι, ἄστροφόν τε μέχρι παντὸς διαμένειν καὶ ἄτρεπτον, ἔστ' ἂν ἡ περίοδος λήξῃ· καὶ ὁ καιρὸς αὐτῷ μεταβάλοι. ὁ δὲ, ἐξ ἐναντίας ἐκείνῳ διεποικίλλετο τῷ σώματι καὶ ἐστρέφετο· ἤσθμαινέ τε πυκνότερον· καὶ οὐδ' ὁπωσοῦν αὐτῷ ἀνακωχὴν ἡ φύσις ἐδίδου.
[222] Jouanno, 'Le corps', 215.
[223] See pages 61-64 on modern readings of Attaleiates' *History*.
[224] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 167-184.

as delusional, so does he structure Isaak's reign under the general idea of an excessively active character. In doing so, and in a manner similar to the way he treated Basil the *parakoimomenos*, Psellos connected the development of the body politic with other elements of the emperors' lives and, finally, with the fate of the emperors' bodies[225]

The pattern repeats time and time again: imperial bodies arrive to the throne anew; Psellos then reveals their respective characteristic deviations from the human ideal; and finally these deviations led to political and individual fatal outcomes.[226] Thus, Basil's austere character coincides with a long life, where his already-decayed body still kept some traits of geometrical perfection.[227] Basil's brother Constantine was not so virtuous, and contracted a disease resulting from his gluttony, which prevented him from walking.[228] The following rulers end up swollen up, as the empire was growing uncontrollably year after year into a monstrous form.[229] Even in the case of Constantine Monomachos, whose disease was characterised by the movement of liquids or humours inside his body,[230] Psellos described the emperor's mishandling of the imperial finances as the injection of painful liquids (χυμοὺς πονηροτέρους τοῖς σπλάγχνοις εἰσενεγκών).[231] Finally, Psellos reclaims Isaak as the exception to the rule: he tried to stop the growth of the imperial body, but his measures, rising from his own *ethos*, are proven too hasty for the empire and for his own body. Psellos linked the 'physical' aspects of the body to the other philosophical elements that worried him.[232] The different aspects of an emperor's life are

[225] The rule applies to characters other than emperors, such as the *parakoimomenos* Basil, and also the rebellious Bardas Phokas, whose body was torn into pieces as his army disaggregated simultaneously: *Chronographia* 1.17.
[226] J. Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía en la historia: algunas consideraciones sobre los géneros literarios en la Cronografía de Miguel Pselo', in V. Valcárcel Martínez (ed.), *Las biografías griega y latina como género literario: de la Antigüedad al Renacimiento. Algunas calas* (Vitoria 2009) 191.
[227] See above on page 238.
[228] *Chronographia* 2.7.
[229] *Chronographia* 3.24 concerning the illness of Romanos III, which made him more irascible and swollen, to the point when wearing imperial robes became painful; on Michael IV's hydropsy, *Chronographia* 4.31 and 4.50-51.
[230] *Chronographia* 6.127-133.
[231] *Chronographia* 7.55.11.
[232] This point echoes earlier statements on approaching Psellos' aesthetic concerns and authorial goals: see pages 52-58.

all subordinated to the ideal harmony, so that when the emperors' characters stray away from the ideal order, so also does the body politic.

6. Temporal aspects of characterisation

In previous chapters, I drew attention to the ways in which narrators depicted characters and events in order to convey a political message in their narratives. A number of cultural conventions work together in the different accounts in order to produce what each author considered a convincing story about the past and thus the present order of things to their intended audiences. This chapter brings forward the role of one last narratological element in the characterisation process; the pace of the narrative, through an analysis of the way these narrators structure their sentences, order words, and construct arguments in their respective historical accounts. This research will add further data on the context and potential reception of the narratives by their contemporary audiences. Apart from studying the order of the elements in each account, and the frequency with which an episode or character is brought to the attention of the audience, the 'narrative rhythm' namely the speed or pace of the story, will be explored by measuring the number of words or pages devoted to a given topic.[1] The aim of this chapter will be to explore the relation between characterisation and narrative time, a connection generally neglected by researchers focused on either Psellos, Attaleiates, or Skylitzes.

Analyses of narrative rhythmical patterns have benefited from the use of other common concepts within the toolkit of the narratologist: *fabula*, *story*, and *text*.[2] Any narrative contains the three elements, or rather every one of these concepts defines one dimension of a given narrative. The 'fabula' of a narrative pertains to the chronologically-arranged sequence of

[1] I.J.F. De Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford 2014) 92.
[2] The following classification is one of many, followed by narrative researchers such as Bal, Genette and, within the field of narratology and antiquity, De Jong: M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto and London 1997 [1985]); G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY and London 1980 [1972]); I.J.F. De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 37-39 and 76-78.

events that is being narrated, as in the account of the rise and fall of a given emperor.[3] A given emperor reaches the throne, rules wisely (or not) and is perhaps deposed by an internal revolt, as in the case of Michael V Kalaphates in our three accounts.[4] The 'story' of a narrative is the way the narrator arranges the fabula throughout the account. For example, the accounts of Attaleiates and Skylitzes are focused on describing how Michael reached the throne and how he was deposed. Psellos instead created a slower dramatic crescendo from the emperor's coronation to the rise of the rebellion that deposed him. Psellos also focused the audience's attention on the allegedly unfair exile of Michael's uncle, John Orphanotrophos. He even presents John's dismissal by Michael V as an event corresponding to the latter's rule, while Skylitzes briefly narrates the event as Zoe's move prior to Michael's coronation.[5] Thus, Psellos describes John's loss of favour in detail as a way to underline the slow progression of Michael's regime into tyranny. Finally, the 'text' of a narrative alludes to the quantifiable dimension of the story, either by counting words (as customary), syllables, letters, lines or paragraphs in written texts, or by counting the seconds taken to narrate something. The 'text' is the form containing the 'story'. Once these three concepts are clear, we can define rhythm, more accurately, as 'the amount of time that is devoted to an event in the story (*story time* or ST) as compared with that in the fabula (*fabula time* or FT)', measured in the text.[6]

Yet another question arises immediately: what is the 'fabula' of our texts, which has been supposedly transformed into a 'story'? One needs to be careful when imagining a 'normal' version of a given story, as opposed to the way our authors tell it, or else they might be accused,

[3] De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 77; other scholars recall the rhetorical nature of this distinction between *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificialis*, which adopted different forms and names in the different narratological approaches over the last century: J. C. Meister, 'Narratology', in P. Hühn et al. (eds.): *The* Living *Handbook of Narratology*, http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/ (Hamburg) (last time visited: 12 February 2019).
[4] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 5; Michael Attaleiates, *History* 10-17/8.22-14.17; John Skylitzes, *Synopsis* 416.58-421.7; see sections 3.2 and 3.4 for a more detailed digression on Michael's role in the *Chronographia* and the *Synopsis*.
[5] *Chronographia* 5.6-8 and 10-14; compared with *Synopsis* 416.74-76.
[6] De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 92.

as Psellos was, of believing in the 'non-existent lines' of geometry.[7] And yet these guidelines do exist in practice. They can be detected either by exploring the 'natural narratives', common to all kinds of human communities or, more useful for these cases, by exploring the intertextual web that surrounds the narratives.[8] In order to detect significant rhythmical features in a given narrative, one can compare it with other texts that use similar generic rules or with other episodes from the same narrative or author.[9] For example, by analysing the encomiastic dedication of Attaleiates' *History* to the emperor Botaneiates, one can either analyse Attaleiates' rhetoric toolkit by contrasting it with Menander's treatise for the *basilikos logos*,[10] or explore relatively contemporary accounts that combine history and *enkomion*, as in Amande's comparative approach between the *History* and the *Life of Basil I* (also known as *Vita Basilii*).[11] A researcher can also analyse Attaleiates' focus on specific elements, such as imperial philanthropy or noble lineage, in comparison with the attention given to these elements throughout the *History* or in other works by Attaleiates. Finally, one could contrast Attaleiates' depiction of Botaneiates in the 'dedication' with other contemporary depictions of the same character, as Kazhdan and Pérez Martín did.[12] By combining all these approaches, one can aim at least to approach these 'invisible lines', and to note in which way a given narrator is straying away from these assumed rules.

[7] Michael Psellos, *Letter to John Xiphilinos* § l.31: Constantine Leichoudes accused Psellos of believing in τὰς οὐκ οὔσας γραμμάς.
[8] See pages 144-153.
[9] A recent example of genre-based narrative rhythm comes from a collective research on the 'rhythm of terror', namely the rhythmical patterns from Swedish media narratives when narrating terror attacks in the country: C. Cassinger, J. Eksell, M. Mansson and O. Thufvesson (2018): 'The Narrative Rhythm of Terror: A Study of the Stockholm Terrorist Attack and the "Last Night in Sweden" Event', *International Journal of Tourism Cities* 4.4 (2018) 484-494.
[10] Menander Rhetor: *The Imperial Oration* esp. 76-95.
[11] C. Amande, 'L'Encomio di Niceforo Botaniate nella storia di Attaliate: modelli, fonti, suggestioni letterarie', *Serta Historica Antiqua* 2 (1989), 265-286.
[12] A.P. Kazhdan, 'The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', in A.P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984) 31; I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates: Historia* (Madrid 2002) 232 n. 12.

Alterations of the story time in a given narrative can be explained in many ways. Narrators, for example, might be interested in subverting genre rules or other kinds of expectations of the audience in order to attract their attention to a specific detail, or to show their skill. René Nünlist highlights a good example from a *scholion* on the Iliad. The writer of the *scholia* noted Homer's use of *prolepsis* (flash-forward) as a 'poetic device' that 'keeps the reader attentive and emotionally engaged'.[13] Authors such as Menander advised a clever use of rhythmical traits in order to produce engaging and convincing works.[14] Furthermore, apparently small changes in the rhythm of a given narrative can change the message substantially. This aspect of narrative rhythm becomes even more crucial when approaching our three nearly contemporary historical narratives, which are devoted to retelling stories that were often, presumably, well known by some members of the audience. Elements such as the exile of Patriarch Keroularios occur in our four narratives, but each narrative interprets the episode differently. This divergence mostly derives from rhythmical differences in each narrative: Psellos chose to mention the episode in passing but underlined positive deeds by the emperor instead.[15] Furthermore, Psellos mentioned that Theodora almost exiled the patriarch during her reign, perhaps signalling that Keroularios' position was fragile even before Isaak took over.[16] Attaleiates, instead, devotes much more attention to the episode of Keroularios' exile, accentuating the imperial errors inherent in his version of this episode. Finally, Skylitzes reduces the importance of the episode by synthesising and thus shortening Attaleiates' words.[17] If, at times, eleventh-century historians lacked the freedom to choose *what* to speak of, they

[13] R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge 2009) 37.
[14] For instance, Menander's treatise on the *basilikos logos*: Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration* 81 advises omitting entire sections of the typical *basilikos logos* if the narrator did not wish to attract the audience's attention to these aspects.
[15] *Chronographia* 7.1-17.
[16] *Chronographia* 6b.17.
[17] *History* 62-66/49.30-53.4 and *Continuation* 104.21-106.2; see the last section of this chapter for a detailed comparison of the *History* and the *Synopsis*, on pages 278-296.

could always decide *how* to present the topic. In this case a critical use of narrative time becomes crucial.

In recent years, narratologists have devoted more attention to the use of rhythm by pre-modern historians.[18] However, research on the rhythmical traits of our sources has been sparse. In the case of Attaleiates' work, Cresci's attention to what she called 'hypothetical modules' – what could have happened had things gone differently – is worthy of mention.[19] Cresci's work, though systematic and useful for exploring Attaleiates' rhetorical repertoire, does not include other rhythmical elements from the *History*, nor does it connect with the overall question of the message conveyed in the narrative. The 'hypothetical module' is clearly vindicated as an effective rhetorical tool, but what it tells us about the narrative's message remains mostly in the shadow. More recently, Krallis' monograph on the political discourse of Attaleiates began with some considerations on the rhythm chosen by Attaleiates in the lesser-known *Ponema Nomikon*, largely a lyrical synthesis of Roman law. In his quantitative analysis, Krallis notes rhythmical differences between the *Ponema Nomikon* and its main source, the *Basilika*. Pinpointing Attaleiates' addition of materials concerning Republican Rome, while marginalising the 'heavy religious content' of the *Basilika*, Krallis argued for the author's desire to ground state reforms on models from ancient Rome.[20] However, Krallis dedicated less attention to the rhythmical elements from other episodes in the *History*, such as the rebellion

[18] S. Fleischman, *Tense and Narrativity: From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction* (Austin, TX 1990); S. Zeelander, *Closure in Biblical Narrative* (Leiden 2012); F.M. Dunn and T. Cole (eds.), *Beginnings in Classical Literature* (Cambridge 1992); J. Grethlein, *Experience and Teleology in Ancient Historiography: Future's Past from Herodotus to Augustine* (Cambridge 2013); for Byzantine studies, see for example T. Kampianaki, 'Vita Basilii, the Power of Rhythm: Constructing the Narrative Landscape of Imperial Propaganda', in M. Lau, C. Franchi, M. di Rodi (eds.) *Landscapes of Power: Selected Papers from the XV Oxford University Byzantine Society International Graduate Conference,* (Oxford 2014) 179-94; L.M. Ciolfi, 'Changing the Rhythm to Change the Society: Narrative time in the *Life of John Vatatzes* (BHG 933)', in C. Messis, M. Mullett, and I. Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018) 159-176.

[19] L.R. Cresci, 'Anticipazione e possibilità: moduli interpretativi della storia di Michele Attaliata', *Ιταλοελληνικα* 3 (1993) 71-96.

[20] D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012*)* xxi-xxiv; also in D. Krallis, *Serving Byzantium's Emperors: The Courtly Life and Career of Michael Attaleiates* (Cham, Switz. 2019) 190-191.

in Constantinople against Michael V Kalaphates leading, as discussed in earlier chapters, to dubious conclusions in regards to Attaleiates' perspective to Michael's reign.[21]

This chapter is divided into two main blocks. The first section explores the 'micro' level of rhythm, focusing on the use of significant words or their arrangements in euphonic patterns in order to captivate the audience and, sometimes, to direct their attention. The second section analyses narrative tempo at the 'macro' level, and examines the overall arrangements of scenes or chapters. As it could not be otherwise for a narrative-focused work, I have already used time-based arguments to sustain different points in previous chapters, by including remarks on word count and by contrasting the focus of different accounts of a given episode. Therefore, my second section explores those episodes which were relatively untouched in previous chapters, such as Psellos' depiction of Emperor Basil II, Attaleiates' four-stage presentation of Romanos IV Diogenes, and Skylitzes' reworking of the *History* in some sections of his *Continuation*.

6.1. Harmonious rhythm: 'the sound of persuasion'

Mastering the rules of academic writing is a relatively long, often frustrating process. Whilst some conventions are traceable to clear grammatical or syntactical rules, the most baffling corrections are those explained by more abstract, apparently unattainable conventions. 'It sounds better this way' becomes sufficient explanation. Learning English academic conventions is not very different from any attempt to understand a particular register in any other language. When translating any Byzantine Greek text, some word choices may seem bizarre, inflating already accurate terms with often redundant suffixes to form concepts even the most comprehensive online dictionaries can barely understand. Attaleiates uses words such

[21] See pages 111-118 above.

as ἀνθαμιλλωμένῳ (‘benchmarks’) or δεινοπραξίαν (‘evil practice’), while Psellos includes unique terms such as ἐπεδημοσίευε (‘declare’ or ‘make something public’) in the *Chronographia*.[22] Appearances aside, to annoy students of later generations did not rank among the top priorities for Byzantine authors. Some of these word choices can be explained as attempts by narrators to showcase their prodigious language skills and draw the readers’ attention to the oddity of their words, or by the author’s need to express a very specific idea by using a particularly eccentric word. This is not necessarily true in all cases, however.[23] In this section, I will explore how these word choices can be connected to ongoing cultural conventions and, ultimately, to the political discourse of the narrative.

Rhythm in Byzantine prose has been largely neglected as a research topic until recent decades. The underlying premise is a modern one, namely that prose, as opposed to verse, lacks rhythm and, should it follow some rhythmical patterns, their analysis would have little to do with the message of the text.[24] Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century research produced a *de facto* consensus, not revised until a few decades ago, which argued that Byzantine prose rhythm essentially depended on how a given clause ended. Briefly explained, if a given clause contained an even number of syllables between the last two accents, it would sound rhythmical to a Byzantine audience.[25] More recently, scholars such as Wolfram Hörandner, Christoph Klock, Marc Lauxtermann, and Vessela Valiavitcharska have asserted that rhythm flows

[22] *History* 71/57.4 and 318/244.10; *Chronographia* 7b.10.18.
[23] Particles such as γάρ, often explained as line-fillers, only recently found renewed attention by academics as effective discursive elements: J. Soltic, ‘The Particle γάρ: From Ancient Greek Sentence Connector to Blatant Line Filler? A Case-study on the Late Medieval Greek Chronicle of Morea’, *Symbolae Osloenses* 88 (2014) 136-147.
[24] V. Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm in Byzantium: The Sound of Persuasion* (Cambridge 2013) 1-3.
[25] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm,* 13; key studies on Meyer’s law, mentioned by Valiavitcharska, are W. Meyer, *Der accentuirte Saltzschluss in der Griechischen Prosa vom iv. bis xvi. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 1891); K. Krumbacher ‘Ein Dithyrambus auf den Chronisten Theophanes’, *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 4 (1896-1897) 583-625; S. Skimina, *État actuel des études sur le rythme de la prose grecque* (Cracow 1937).

throughout sentences.[26] In the words of Valiavitcharska, Byzantine writers 'defined mellifluous prose as a pleasing arrangement of various rhythmical feet, which depend on the relative proportions between the upbeat and the downbeat'.[27] Valiavitcharska also convincingly argues that these patterns are far from unimportant in the production of an argument in Byzantine prose: 'It is rhythm that sets the pace for the argument and demands certain argumentative elements and arrangements'.[28] Byzantine writers would learn to connect different cadences harmoniously by carefully choosing the words and their syntactic order. Authors such as Dionysios of Halikarnassos argued that using different rhythms would evoke distinct emotions from the reader.[29] More specifically, an anonymous thirteenth-century commentary on Hermogenes encouraged the use of dactyl, anapaest and spondee as a way of evoking solemnity.[30] Finally, Pseudo-Hermogenes' *On Invention* provides examples where the number of unstressed syllables decreases up to a climactic end. Valiavitcharska noted how, in this example, the rhythm chosen 'delivers both the content and the urgency behind the point'.[31] Byzantine authors used these treatises as models for their own writings, not perceiving their contemporary works as distant from ancient Greek metrical patterns: they grounded their knowledge of rhythm in ancient rhetoricians such as Hermogenes and Aristoxenos of Tarentum, who distinguished between metrics –exclusively applied to verse– and rhythm.[32]

Our analysis of the Byzantine political ideology conveyed in these accounts intersects with the study of these rhythmical matters for two main reasons. Firstly, Valiavitcharska has

[26] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 15-16; W. Hörandner, *Prosarythmus in der retorischen Literatur der Byzantiner* (Vienna 1981); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington 1985); C. Klock, *Untersuchungen zu Stil und Rhythmus bei Gregor von Nyssa: Ein Beitrag zum Rhetorikverständnis der greichischen Väter* (Frankfurt am Main 1987) 219-260; M.D. Lauxtermann, *The Spring of Rhythm: An Essay on the Political Verse and other Byzantine Metres* (Vienna 1999).
[27] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 18.
[28] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 21.
[29] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 185; Dem. 22.
[30] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 37; *RhetGr.* 7.1:82, ed. C. Walz (Stuttgart 1832-1836).
[31] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 11; Hermog. *Inv.*, in *RhetGr.* 716.1-4, ed. C. Walz (Stuttgart 1832-1836).
[32] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 25 and 33.

shown that, by mastering prose rhythm, Byzantine writers acquired a powerful tool for persuasion, self-promotion and peer recognition. Psellos recounted how the quickening pace of a homily by Gregory of Nazianzus made the audience marvel, cheer, and even break into a dance.[33] Valiavitcharska concludes that 'rhythm forces us into a shared emotional experience, which is difficult to avoid'.[34] Precisely, what our eleventh-century historians do in their accounts is to produce a narrative that, through persuasion, will eventually lead to a shared view of the past, and thus political consensus.[35]

Secondly, we should also be careful not to consider rhythm just as an aesthetic feature of speech, easily peeled off from the message itself. As Psellos specified in the *Chronographia*, rhetoric's focus on 'word-harmonies and rhythmic cadences' is not 'merely persuasive falsehood, or speaking on both sides of an issue. It also cleaves to an exacting muse and blossoms with philosophic thoughts and finely-spoken turns of phrase, and its audience is drawn by both'.[36] Therefore, for Psellos, rhetoric is not only an instrument used for adorning philosophical thoughts; it also helps to produce new ideas. Valiavitcharska demonstrated how closely related form and content are in the case study on *enthymema*, a kind of abbreviated syllogism, where one of the fundamental premises is implicit in the sentence since it is shared between author and audience. The rhythmical patterns of the Byzantine *enthymema* both form a canvas for the creation of new thought, and persuade the audience to accept what is being said 'regardless of the actual validity of the argument'.[37] It is the rhetorical frame of the *enthymema*, linked to euphonic rhythms, which provides the basis for new thoughts, in line

[33] P. Levy, *Michaelis Pselli de Gregorii Theologi charactere iudicium: accredit eiusdem de Ioannis Chrysostomi charactere iudicium ineditum* (Leipzig 1912): 58-59. Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 7.
[34] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 182-183.
[35] L. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (Austin, TX 2015) 94-100 in relation to epideictic rhetoric.
[36] *Chronographia* 6.197.24-25: ἁρμονίᾳ τὲ λέξεων ... καὶ τοῖς ἐκείνης ῥυθμοῖς; 6.197.27-30: οὐδὲ τῷ πιθανῷ μόνον ψεύδει· καὶ τῷ πρὸς τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀμφιρρεπεῖ ἐγκαλλωπίζεται· ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀκριβοῦς ἅπτεται μούσης· καὶ ταῖς μὲν ἐννοίαις φιλοσοφεῖ· ἀνθεῖ δὲ τῇ καλλιεπείᾳ τῶν λέξεων· καὶ τὸν ἀκροατὴν διχόθεν ἑαυτῆς ἐξαρτᾷ.
[37] Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm*, 125.

with Psellos' words above. The creation of the message goes hand-in-hand with its rhetorical format.

The production of euphony, not only related to the rhythmical succession of upbeats and downbeats, but to the use of similar-sounding words, can be traced back in different middle Byzantine historical narratives. Zonaras' rhetorical toolkit remains understudied, and yet his account excels in using this and other tools of euphony for episodes such as the accession to the throne of Basil I the Macedonian and his government measures. For example, Zonaras uses alliteration in the section recounting Basil's quarrel with Photios: in this instance, Basil argues that Photios' position as patriarch of Constantinople is illegitimate since the previous patriarch Ignatios was still alive. Zonaras then wraps up Basil's accusation by comparing the situation with Patroklos' impersonation of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Zonaras uses four words, three of them begin with the letter pi, the two latter beginning with the sound [pro]: Πάτροκλον τοῦτο πρόφασιν προβαλλόμενος.[38] Thus, Zonaras concluded the episode in an aesthetically pleasing way.

We can also find situations where applauded rhythmical patterns go hand in hand with rhyme in the same account. The *Epitome* of Zonaras provides a good reference to this use of rhythm and rhyme here, since we are able to match his word choices – or those from his source– with the *Life of Basil* or Book Five of the Continuation of Theophanes, and the later *Synopsis* of Skylitzes.[39] Within the account of Basil I, Zonaras includes the conversion of the Rus and

[38] John Zonaras, *Epitome* 419.16-17: 'this event surpassing that alleged to Patroklos'.

[39] Some words from the *Epitome* show a loose relation between this account and the other two. In the first line: Πολλοὺς and δόσεσι (435.4) in reference to the 'many' [Jews] converted through the 'giving' [of presents] connects the accounts of Zonaras and Skylitzes (*Synopsis* 165.10); σπεισάμενος (making libations) appears both in the *Epitome* (435.5-6) and in the *Life of Basil I* (97.4) but not in the *Synopsis*; finally, at the end of the account of the Rus conversion, ἀδιαλώβητον ἔμεινεν (*Epitome* 436.3, the Gospel 'remained intact' in the fire) is close enough to the διαμεῖναν ἀπαθὲς καὶ ἀλώβητον from the other two accounts (*Life of Basil I* 97.41 and *Synopsis* 166.40); on the relation between these tree texts and their earlier sources, see E.S. Kiapidou, *H* Συνόψη Ιστοριών *του Ιωάννη Σκυλίτζη και οι πηγές της (811-1057)* (Athens 2010) 65-95; A. Markopoulos, 'Le public des textes historiographiques à l'époque macédonienne', *Parekbolai. An Electronic Journal for Byzantine Literature* 5 (2015) 70-71.

sections on the forced conversion of the Byzantine Jewish population to Orthodoxy. His account mostly resembles those from the Continuator of Theophanes and Skylitzes. In the *Vita*, the first half of the passage summarises the conversion of the Jewish people, the re-conversion of the Bulgarians (omitted in the *Epitome*), and the conversion of the Rus, while the second half narrates how the Rus were convinced of the authenticity of the Orthodox faith, by putting a copy of the Gospel into a fire and watching it remain unburned.[40]

We find entire groups of words from the Continuator copied into the *Synopsis* of Skylitzes, but the latter's version is briefer. The 712-word section in Continuator shrinks into 347 words in the *Synopsis*.[41] Skylitzes seems interested in staying true to most of the details of the story about the conversion of the Rus, possibly because it depicts a seemingly reliable anecdote, as opposed to the more general, overtly encomiastic, statements from the section about the conversion of Jews, Bulgarians, and Rus. Therefore, the 360-word anecdote from the Continuator occupies 292 words in the account of Skylitzes, whilst the former, more general paragraph reduces its size from 348 words in the *Life of Basil* to merely 55 words in the *Synopsis.*[42]

Zonaras proceeds the same way as Skylitzes, but simplifies the message even further: the anecdote on the conversion of the Rus occupies 134 words in his account, and the introduction becomes two brief sentences, even erasing any reference to the Bulgarians.[43] In order to successfully transform a detailed account into a simple but sharp statement, Zonaras uses both rhythm and rhyme in the very first clause:

[40] *Life of Basil I* 95-97.
[41] *Synopsis* 165.10-166.43.
[42] I drew the line between the two sections in *Life of Basil I* 97.7 and *Synopsis* 165.16.
[43] *Epitome* 435.4-436.5; the second section of the account begins at 435.8.

> καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων πολλοὺς δόσεσι χρημάτων καὶ ὑποσχέσεσι χριστιανοὺς γενέσθαι πέπεικε· καὶ τῷ ἔθνει τῶν Ῥῶς σπεισάμενος εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἐλθεῖν τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς μυστηρίου πεποίηκε.
>
> And he persuaded many among the Jews to become Christians with gifts in cash and promises; and, since he made peace with the people of the Rus, he made them come to a recognition of our mystery.[44]

Zonaras divided the sentence into two clauses containing almost the same number of syllables – twenty-eight and twenty-nine respectively. Furthermore, each section ends with a word that, at least from the eleventh-century onwards, had an almost-identical sound: /p`epike/ and /pep`iike/.[45] The use of πεποίηκε in the second clause is connected to the classicising approach that Zonaras adopts to recount the Rus conversion: Basil 'persuaded' some Jews to become Christians but, in the case of the Rus, he 'made libations' [sued for peace] and *made* them 'come to a recognition of our mystery'. The choices of Zonaras, or his source, for this sentence both allow for euphony and imprint a distinct approach to the episode, quite different from Skylitzes' more sober version.[46]

Lastly, in Zonaras' account we can also find creative allocation of words in order to bring a concept to the reader's mind. It is difficult to know whether Zonaras would expect his readers to associate the sound 'pro-' from the previous alliteration with anything specific. However, words beginning with βασιλ- are clearly expected to signify imperial matters to the readers of Zonaras. Although the *Life of Basil* already exploits the closeness of the name of Basil to the imperial βασιλεῖα – Basil seems predestined to attain the homonymous position – Zonaras goes even further. I will consider the prophetic words of a Peloponnesian monk concerning Basil's

[44] *Epitome* 435.4-7.
[45] D. Holton, G. Horrocks, M. Janssen, T. Lendari, I. Manolessou, and N. Toufexis, *The Cambridge Grammar of Medieval and Early Modern Greek*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 2019) 10-12 on the monopthongization of the dipthong /ei/ (ει) into /i/ and the assimilation of the sound /y/ (οι) with /i/ by the eleventh century: significantly, the Continuator of Theophanes possibly pronounced the second word differently, closer to /pep`yike/; Zonaras' amendment would not have made as much sense to him as to Zonaras' twelfth-century audience.
[46] Zonaras' account does use the language register of mysteric cults (Christianity being one of them) in other occassions, as in *Epitome* 445.4-6, where the Hagarene eunuch Samonas 'learns about' a plot against the ruler, and decides to go to him and 'reveal the mystery': ἦν δὲ ὁ Σαμωνᾶς ἐξ Ἀγαρηνῶν καὶ μαθὼν τὸ κατὰ τοῦ κρατοῦντος μελέτημα εὐθὺς ἐκφέρει πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸ μυστήριον.

glorious future as an example. We find approximately the same words in the *Life of Basil* and the *Synopsis* to recount the monk's speech. The monk, who is usually unconcerned with other peoples' distinctions, rises up and salutes Basil due to his glorious future as emperor.[47] However, Zonaras' word choice allows the link between Basil and the βασιλεῖα to be recognisable to the ear, as he has the monk say the following:

> 'ὁ δέ 'τὸν μὲν Θεοφιλίτζην ἰδιώτην' εἶπεν 'ἑώρων, βασιλέα δὲ τὸν Βασίλειον, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὡς βασιλέα τὸν ἄνδρα τετίμηκα. ἴσθι γὰρ ὡς πρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ βασιλεὺς ἐκεῖνος ἀφώρισται'.
>
> He said 'having seen Theophilitzes a laymen, on the other hand Basil a *basileus*, for this reason I honoured the man as *basileus*. For know that that one has been ordained by God as *basileus*'.[48]

Only the second βασιλέα appears in the other sources. Moreover, neither the Continuator nor Skylitzes, mentions the names of Basil and his master Theophilitzes in that sentence. Most likely, Zonaras repeats the name of Theophilitzes as a way to justify the inclusion of Basil's name in the comparative clause as well. Zonaras thus associated names with related words in order to underline an idea that would be commonplace to the readership of the account: the accession of Basil, through his friendship with Emperor Michael III, from the stables to the position of βασιλεύς. A further game of words arises when Michael III has a new favourite: Basilikinos. Like Basil, the reader can easily perceive how the story repeats again as the names of Basil and Basilikinos orbit together around the concepts of βασιλεύς and βασιλεῖον, until Basil decides to put the situation to a violent end.[49]

The account of Zonaras provides several examples of how Byzantine authors could arrange words in ways that would be noted by the audience, underscoring the point intended by the author. Zonaras is not alone in doing this. In the dedication of the *History*, Attaleiates

[47] *Life of Basil I* 11.31-34; *Synopsis* 122.71-74.
[48] *Epitome* 434.1-4.
[49] *Epitome* 415.12.

harmonises divine approval and popular consensus in Botaneiates' accession to the throne: 'βασιλεύσας δὲ ψήφῳ Θεοῦ / καὶ ἱκεσίᾳ πάντων ὁμοῦ'.[50] Although the sentence will continue after ὁμοῦ with a καὶ, instead of stopping with a semicolon or a full stop, modern Greek intonations allow us to note some significant elements here. The two parts of the clause – before the *καὶ* and from then onwards – have an almost identical number of syllables (identical, if the sound *καὶ* does not absorb the following iota). Furthermore, each part ends in a syllabic rhyme.

Later on in the narrative, Attaleiates adds rhyme and a verse-like rhythm to the beginning of the dramatic account of the civil war instigated by Isaak Komnenos: 'καὶ δεξιὰν παῖς πατρικῷ χραίνει φόνῳ καὶ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφῷ καιρίαν ἐλαύνει'.[51] In another highly dramatic instance of the narration, namely the discussion of the ancient and contemporary Romans, Attaleiates uses alliteration based on the sound [θe-], emphasising the importance of the divine element in his argument: 'ἀλλ' ἔξω πάσης βουλῆς θεοφιλοῦς καὶ θεραπείας τοῦ θείου'.[52] Additionally, Attaleiates seems to defend the rights of Nikephoros Botaneiates over Bryennios based on the shape of their name. Once Bryennios is captured, Botaneiates criticises him for the rebellion: 'O this insanity of yours, you did not even understand this simple thing, that those who study these matters know that the letter *n* in the verses is single and not double'.[53] Is Attaleiates suggesting that the composition of somebody's name shapes their destiny? The sentence is placed in the most encomiastic section of the account, but that does not necessarily mean that its veracity should be doubted, as explored in previous chapters. Apart from the aforementioned connections between Basil and the βασιλεῖα, and the explicit prestige of the name Constantine for emperors throughout the empire's history, oracles and prophecies also

[50] *History* 3/3.10-11: 'Ruling by the will of God / and the unanimous pleading…'
[51] *History* 55/44.19-20: 'Hands of sons were stained with the blood of fathers; brother struck down brother'.
[52] *History* 194/150.6-7: 'instead, they distance themselves from any decision that would please God and honour the divine'.
[53] *History* 293/225.20-23: Ὢ τῆς ἀνοίας τῆς σῆς, ὅτι μηδὲ τὸ πρόχειρον τοῦτο συνῆκας καὶ κατενόησας, ὡς τὸ ᾀδόμενον στοιχεῖον, τὸ Ν, ἁπλοῦν μόνον καὶ οὐ διπλοῦν τοῖς ταῦτα κατασκοποῦσιν εὑρίσκετο.

played a role in the power plays of twelfth-century Byzantium. Among them, the AIMA prophecy, recounted by Choniates, predicted that the first letter of the Komnenian emperors' names would complete the Greek word for 'blood': Ἀλέξιος, Ἰωάννης, Μανουήλ, and Ἀλέξιος.[54] Therefore, it is possible that a not-so-distant author like Attaleiates might give some credibility to the connection between given names and supernatural forces, and thus, the word order in his account could have even further meaning for both himself and his intended audience.

Concerning the *Chronographia*, Psellos seems to use word games to abbreviate and clarify complex ideas. When Isaak Komnenos distributed honours to the military, he assigned the higher ranks to the better soldiers and the lower to the inferior ones: 'καὶ μειζόνων ἀξιοῖ βαθμῶν, τοὺς μὲν μείζους, ἀπονέμων τοῖς μείζοσι· τοὺς ἐλάττους δὲ, τοῖς ἐλάττοσι'.[55] Much as in the case of Zonaras' abridged statements, Psellos may have expected the audience to applaud a statement that is at once brief, clear, and euphonic. Psellos also exploited the connection between Basil's name and the *βασιλεῖα* in the first book of the *Chronographia*, perhaps as a way to lead into, or rather to return to, the depiction of Emperor Basil II. Following the episode of his quarrel with the *parakoimomenos*, Psellos introduced the emperor Basil in a new thematic unit with the following words: Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος, τὴν τῆς βασιλείας ἐπιγνοὺς ποικιλίαν.[56] This emphasis is repeated a few lines later (ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος...).[57]

[54] Niketas Choniates, *History* 146.9-14; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge 1993) 200; an earlier prophecy based on the first letter of the ruler's name is collected in John Skylitzes' *Synopsis* 338.53-56: Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas believed in a prophecy that proclaimed the new emperor's name would start with the letter B –as it turned out, emperor Basil remained in the throne.
[55] *Chronographia* 7.8.5-6: 'the higher ranks being assigned to the better soldiers and the lower to the others'.
[56] *Chronographia* 1.22.1-2: 'The *basileus* Basil, having observed the complexity of the empire…'
[57] *Chronographia* 1.29.3; similarly, it seems quite coincidental that Psellos mentioned Emperor Basil's destruction of the monastery built by the *parakoimomenos* Basil as an example of the emperor's irrational zeal against the courtier, when that monastery was precisely consecrated to Basil the Great: in my view, the passage underlines what Psellos underlined before: the *parakoimomenos* was of his own kin, and Basil's blows against him were, in some way, blows against himself; in any case, the narration focuses on feeling pity for the *parakoimomenos*, and not in Basil: see pages 157 above and 268-278 below; also see T. Papamastorakis, 'Tampering with History: From Michael III to Michael VIII', *BZ* 96 (2003) 193-209.

A further example belongs to Psellos' account of the Rus attack on Constantinople, already discussed in chapter four. There, Psellos explains the Russian attack as the ultimate consequence of the barbarian hatred against the Romans. However, the Rus did not dare to prepare an attack until the death of the emperors Basil, who terrified them, and Constantine, whose departure marked the end of the εὐγενὲς κράτος.[58] Romanos' reign still impressed the Rus due to its partial glory and distinction,[59] but they decided to attack when the rule was in hands of 'some obscure person called Michael'.[60] It might seem that Psellos is not properly explaining what made some emperors glorious or undistinguished, as if that was self-evident. To add further confusion, Psellos depiction of each ruler's glory do not match with the information conveyed in previous books: Constantine is not worth sharing the glory of his brother Basil, Romanos' depiction constitutes an archetype of failure and delusion, while Michael' rule was reflected as anything but remarkable in book four –Psellos even ignores the existence of a second emperor Michael.[61]

These factors propel me to argue that Psellos is presenting each ruler's worth as a deterrent of foreign invasions based on the only information available in the passage: their very names. Thus, the Rus were presented as frightened by the symbolically powerful names of Basil, Constantine, and, to some extent, Romanos. Michael was the first ruler whose name could not be directly associated either to the *basileia*, or to the founder of the empire, or even with the Romans. Such an interpretation fits with the fact that Psellos later argued that Constantine Monomachos was not responsible for the Rus invasion: their plan had originated

[58] *Chronographia* 6.91.6, a concept Sewter translated as 'noble dynasty', but could be also translated as 'noble power', 'authority' or 'rule'.
[59] *Chronographia* 6.91.8-9: ἡ τοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ βασιλεία λαμπρά τις αὐτοῖς νενόμιστο καὶ περιφανὴς.
[60] *Chronographia* 6.91.11-12: καὶ εἰς ἄσημόν τινα, τὸν Μιχαὴλ τὸ κράτος μετέπεσεν.
[61] Psellos' summary does not match with his argument in other abridged commentaries on the different rulers of the eleventh century conveyed in the very same *Chronographia*, as in 7.52-57. There, Basil is presented as an uncontested model of rule, while Constantine initiated the empire's decline, deepened by Romanos and somewhat mitigated by Michael; Michael Kalaphates is in fact characterised as low-born, but Psellos does not mention us the previous Michael here, which inclines me to think that the emphasis is on the name rather than in other elements of its reign.

before he even accessed to the throne.[62] Psellos' eulogistic account of Constantine in the passage of the Rus attack, thus, might even include a praise of his condition as 'new Constantine'. The whole story, though not set in contradiction with the rest of the *Chronographia*, might have worked as, or be inspired in a previous *enkomion* to Constantine, celebrating the ruler's victory over the barbarians. As I will discuss in the following section, the reader of the *Chronographia* should not ignore, despite the book's apparent internal consistency, Psellos' reuse of previous narratives and works in order to create a new whole, not very differently from other contemporary historians such as Skylitzes.

In conclusion, rhythmical or euphonic patterns appear to have been a priority to Byzantine narrators during the process of composing a piece of prose. These patterns, internalised during the successive stages of a Byzantine intellectual's career, were not only an adornment of a sentence, but the canvas where new thoughts could be introduced and phrased. In addition, in cases such as Attaleiates' prophecy, a harmonious word order could be regarded as the appropriate frame for a cosmic truth.

6.2. Three Basils, four Romanoi, and two Attaleiates: time and episode mapping.

While the previous section focused on the arrangement of small groups of words in order to form euphonically, or symbolically relevant, statements (or both) – what one can call the 'micro' dimension of the analysis of narrative time – this section will jump into the 'macro' dimension by discussing how narrators used time to prepare whole scenes for their narratives. The narrative tricks remain the same: the order in which episodes are arranged in the narrative, the rhythm or, more specifically, the number of words devoted to an episode, and the frequency with which an aspect is brought to the audience's attention.

[62] *Chronographia* 6.91.

We begin with one example of episode mapping from outside our main sources. The narration of Nicholas Mesarites on the *coup* orchestrated by John Komnenos 'the Fat' in 1202 has received some recent attention, together with a general renewed interest in Mesarites' writings.[63] Scholars have explored this account from several perspectives. In particular, Flusin argued that the manuscript which contained most of the accounts preserved from Mesarites, now divided in Cod. Ambr. Gr. F 93 and Cod. Ambr. Gr. F 96, may include autographical works. Bernard Flusin pointed to the curious correspondence between the ends of given chapters and the end of pages.[64] However, the equally curious structure of Mesarites' account has remained unnoticed. In particular, the account of the *coup* of John Axoukh, as preserved in Cod. Ambr. Gr. F 96, is divided in thirty one units. Each unit includes about around 300 words – except the shorter sections 1, 15, 21, and 22 of around 120-150 words; and the bigger sections 13, 16, 18, 25, and 28, containing up to 650 words – and often introduces a new element to the narrative. The thematic division becomes all more apparent when we divide the account in four group of units. The first group (from the title to section nine) narrates John's coup up to the moment when he accesses the imperial palaces; sections nine to fifteen narrate Mesarites' journey to the church of Pharos and the description of the relics that ought to be protected; sections sixteen to twenty-three describe Mesarites' battle to protect the relics; and sections twenty-four to thirty-one abandon Mesarites and the church to narrate the sad end of John and his followers.[65] The division between the first and the second section, and between the third and the fourth, is highlighted by Mesarites himself, when he stops the flow of the narrative with a digression.[66] Additionally, the transition from section two to three is marked by the

[63] Michael Angold's recent publication of Mesarites' texts, translated into English, is surely contributing to renewed academic interest in this author: M. Angold, *Nicholas Mesarites: his life and works (in translation)* (Liverpool 2017).
[64] B. Flusin, 'Les reliques de la Sainte-Chapelle et leur passé imperial à Constantinople', in J. Durand and M.P. Laffitte (eds.), *Le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle* (Paris 2001) 36; B. Flusin, 'Nicholas Mésaritès: Éthopée d'un astrologue qui ne put devenir patriarche', *Travaux et Mémoires* 14 (2002) 234-241.
[65] Mesarites, *The Coup of John Komnenos* 19.1-25.18, 25.19-32.37, 33.1-41.5, and 41.6-49.7.
[66] Mesarites, *The Coup of John Komnenos*, 25.19-23 and 40.11-17.

climatic break of hostilities between Mesarites and those who wish to remove the relics.[67] Thus, the author of the division of the paragraphs – if Flusin is correct, Mesarites himself – divided the narration into thirty-one sections, grouped in four sets of seven or eight paragraphs each.

Possibly Mesarites divided the accounts consciously. A comparable case of deliberate textual division can be seen in the internal division of the seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale*, which represents a harmonious division of time according to the sacred history.[68] Dividing the account this way may have helped the writer's creative process, or perhaps it was aimed at narrowing the account to reasonable dimensions for a speech. Returning to Mesarites, it is also significant that, if the two intermediate sections of the narrative are removed, we are left with a perfectly readable account of the attempted usurpation *without* Mesarites' involvement, which takes about half the time to read but loses neither internal coherence, nor significant details on the causes and consequences of the *coup*. If read alone, the removed section provides us with a sharp, first-person approach to the scenario, which is equally autonomous. This division of the narrative matches Mesarites' alleged purposes in writing his account: many among his peers asked him multiple times 'to tell them in detail everything that happened to me from beginning to end … [and] everything [John] did until evening and finally the details of the decapitation of this half-wit.'[69] Mesarites' careful division of the narrative suggests that he was able, with the same materials, to recount the story in two works, depending on the audience and the circumstances. Therefore, by analysing Mesarites' creative use of time in his account, we may come up with new evidence to support different hypothesis about the context and aim of his work.

[67] Mesarites, *The Coup of John Komnenos*, 33.1.
[68] C. Gastgeber, *Studien zum* Chronicon Paschale (Vienna 2019) [forthcoming].
[69] Mesarites, *The Coup of John Komnenos*, 19.24-20.2.

The following section returns us to our eleventh-century sources. Each following sub-section will be devoted to one of our accounts. Noteworthy issues pertaining to word-count and thematic focus have been discussed in previous chapters. Therefore, I will now focus on famous but relatively unexamined episodes, from Attaleiates' depiction of Romanos IV and his defeat at Manzikert to Psellos' ambiguous depiction of Basil II.

6.2.1. Crafting episodes for the *Chronographia*: the oddities of Book one.

It is no secret that the key to understanding Psellos' words, as with any other author, often lies not in *what* he says but in *how* he phrases the sentence. For example, Psellos did not depict Emperor Romanos IV as an outright tyrant, but mixed abundant criticism with some few positive remarks. When Romanos is depicted charging against the enemy at Manzikert, Psellos does not fully condemn the action by putting all of the blame for the ultimate defeat solely on the emperor's decision. Instead, Psellos 'sandwiches' his criticism between two thin layers of praise, giving an appearance of equanimity to his argument:

> His action can be interpreted in two ways. My own view represents the mean between these two extremes. On the one hand, if you regard him as a hero, courting danger and fighting courageously it is reasonable to praise him; on the other, when one reflects that a general, if he conforms to the accepted rules of strategy, must remain aloof from the battle-line, supervising the movements of his army and issuing the necessary orders to the men under his command, then Romanos' conduct on this occasion would appear foolhardy in the extreme, for he exposed himself to danger without a thought of the consequences. I myself am more inclined to praise than to blame him for what he did.[70]

[70] *Chronographia* 7b.21.1-9: Τὸ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα, ἐπαινεῖν μὲν οὐκ ἔχω· ψέγειν δὲ οὐ δύναμαι: αὐτὸς τὸν ὅλον κίνδυνον δέχεται. τοῦτο δὲ μέσον ἐστὶν ἀντιρρήσεως. εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὡς φιλοκίνδυνον λογίσαιτό τις τὸν ἄνδρα· καὶ ἀγωνιστὴν προθυμότατον, ἔχοι ἂν ἀφορμὰς πρὸς ἐγκώμιον· εἰ δ' ὅτι δέον κατὰ τὴν στρατηγικὴν ἀκρίβειαν πόρρω ἵστασθαι, πρωτοστράτηγον τυγχάνοντα τοῦ στρατεύματος· καὶ τοῖς πλήθεσιν ἐπιτάττειν τὰ δέοντα· ὁ δὲ ἀλογίστως παρεκινδύνευε, πολλὰ ἂν ἐς αὐτὸν ἀποσκώψειεν. ἐγὼ δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐπαινούντων· ἀλλ' οὐ τῶν αἰτιωμένων εἰμί; on Psellos' presumed ambivalence, several authors defended this aspect as a keystone of Psellos' philosophy: G. Miles, 'Psellos and his Traditions', in S. Mariev (ed.), *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism* (Boston, MA and Berlin 2017) 81; D. Jenkins, 'Psellos' Conceptual Precision', in C. Barber and D. Jenkins, *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden 2006) 131-151 ; E. Delli, 'Entre compilation et originalité: le corps pneumatique dans l'oeuvre de Michel Psellos, in Ancona, C. (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists* (Leiden and Boston, MA 2007) 211-230 ; G. Miles, 'Living as a Sphinx: Composite Being and Monstruous Interpreter in the 'Middle

Similarly, Psellos' presentation of Romanos Diogenes mentions, in just six words, the noble ascendance of the character, only to expand into a twenty-two word summary of the suicide of Romanos' father. That matter is avoided entirely by Attaleiates, while Skylitzes mentions it earlier, when the episode took place during the reign of Romanos III.[71] Though Psellos' overall style and narrative focus visibly differs from Skylitzes', the mention of the suicide – a clear negative aspect of his lineage – at the beginning of his discussion of Romanos clearly neutralises any possible aura of imperial dignity.

These examples lead to the main question of this section: how the *Chronographia* is structured overall, and what we can know about its argument through analysing its use of narrative time. The account of Romanos belongs to the second part of the *Chronographia*, possibly written almost twenty years after the first part. Scholars often examine this section separately, arguing that the goals of Psellos are quite different in each part.[72] His depiction of Constantine X stands as an outright *enkomion* in a manner not seen before in the account. Later on, Psellos demolishes the character and actions of Romanos IV, and consequently, legitimises the actions perpetrated by the court faction around the young emperor Michael VII – his own included. Finally, the *Chronographia* ends with a collection of little *enkomia* around the different members of the Doukas family, which has been considered comparatively alien to the first half of the *Chronographia*.

The second part of the *Chronographia* does diverge in style – though reducing the distinction to a clash between history and *enkomion* would be misleading given the wide variety

Life' of Michael Psellos', in Kambaskovic-Sawers, D. (ed.), *Conjunctions: Body and Mind from Plato to the Enlightenment* (Dordrecht 2014) 11-24.

[71] *Chronographia* 7b10.1-4; *Synopsis* 385.46-49.

[72] See note 12 from chapter 2, on page 46.

of literary genres introduced in the account.[73] It is hazardous to assume, as is often done, that the early sections of the account remained unaltered, even more so when its classic counterpart, Attaleiates' *History*, clearly contains later additions in early sections of the account.[74] In this respect, an analysis of the structure of the *Chronographia* will help to decipher regularities and significant exceptions in its construction.

Psellos' narrative is far from regular, but there are certain patterns in the pace of the narrative and the overall structure of each reign. To begin with, in the words of Jouanno, 'du moins les héros de la Chronographie sont-ils beaux en début de règne, car en général, leur corps ne tarde guère à s'altérer'.[75] Although Psellos' historical work can be conceived as a collection of imperial portraits, these portraits are never static. They depend on a fourth, temporal dimension. This dimension does not only have to do with the life stages mentioned earlier, but with Psellos' narrative moving from a former, ideal state of affairs, into later corruption of emperor and empire. For example, although Romanos III is first described as an overconfident emperor, almost delusional in his ambitions, Psellos devotes most of his account to showing how his character clashes with the surrounding circumstances. This confrontation corrupts emperor and empire, ultimately destroying the former. Romanos' pride and delusional worldview results in a military disaster, exhausting the resources of the Treasury, and allowing his wife, Empress Zoe, to arrange his removal. Everything revolves around Romanos or, at least, what Psellos presents as the defining traits of his character.[76] One could proceed similarly with most of the rulers in the account. As discussed in chapters four and five, other events and descriptions found in Psellos' narrative, even references to philosophy schools, are set in

[73] J. Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía en la historia: algunas consideraciones sobre los géneros literarios en la Cronografía de Miguel Pselo', in V. Valcárcel Martínez (ed.), *Las biografías griega y latina como género literario: de la Antigüedad al Renacimiento. Algunas calas* (Vitoria 2009) 175-206.
[74] See page 92 above.
[75] C. Jouanno, 'Le corps du prince dans la Chronographie de Michael Psellos', *Kentron* 19 (2003) 206.
[76] See pages 83-88 above.

comparison with the emperor's *ethos*.[77] An extreme case is the depiction of Isaak Komnenos, the last emperor recorded in the first part of the *Chronographia*. In trying to cure the disease of the empire, Isaak introduced excessive remedies to the imperial body, worsening its state and then contracting a sickness similar to the one he introduced to the empire.[78] Stories in the *Chronographia* revolve around emperor and empire, with the exception of the character of Psellos himself.

However, two books diverge from this pattern. The sixth book is a comparative oddity, both in terms of quantity and quality. Psellos devoted the book to the reign of Constantine Monomachos, together with the empresses Zoe and Theodora, and then the sole reign of Theodora. Book Six occupies about a third of the entire *Chronographia* – ninety-nine pages out of the two-hundred ninety-nine contained in Reinsch's edition. This imbalance becomes more apparent if we remove the second part of the *Chronographia*, published over a decade and a half earlier, from the equation: then Book Six occupies ninety-nine pages out of two-hundred fifty, forty percent of the text. Concerning its contents, the book includes lengthy digressions and vivid court stories that Psellos can claim as first-hand accounts. The sections involving the political threats of Maniakes, Tornikios, and the Rus arrive only after thirty pages of internal affairs, and fall within the second third of the sixth book. Overall, Psellos' privileged position at the court of Constantine and the longevity of his reign may well justify the oddities of the sixth book in the overall structure of the *Chronographia*.[79] For instance, Psellos felt the necessity to include a thousand-word *pseudo-prooimion* at the beginning of Constantine's

[77] See pages 171-178.
[78] See pages 237-245 above.
[79] J. Signes Codoñer, 'Retórica, biografía y autobiografía',195: 'Sin embargo, el énfasis en la autopsia por parte de nuestro autor va mucho más allá de la historiografía tradicional. En efecto, Pselo no maneja ni cita fuentes escritas y se basa sólo en su conocimiento directo de los hechos. Ello tiene como consecuencia que Pselo no hable de batallas que no ha visto o no ha presenciado, pero, y sobre todo, que nuestro autor se extienda inevitablemente más en los reinados de los emperadores de los que es contemporáneo y ha contemplado sus acontecimientos que en aquellos a los que trató poco o apenas conoció por ser niño'.

reign, defending himself from potential accusers who might criticise Psellos for criticising his former patron.[80] Some lengthy anecdotes blossom in the middle account with the excuse of proving a point Psellos made about the emperor or the empire. These shorter stories resemble each other, even in the location of ancient quotes either introducing the anecdote – 'a head to the body' of the story, as Psellos declared – or concluding it.[81] After Psellos develops the anecdote, the narrator resumes his journey across the increasingly chaotic empire of Constantine Monomachos. Thus, the sixth book, though abnormal in terms of size, nevertheless follows a rhythmical pattern.

Book one, dedicated to Basil II, is also irregular. This case study becomes all the more important as previous analyses of the *Chronographia* have not noted its oddity.[82] Instead, scholars took Basil's depiction to be the role model for later emperors. It is easy to see why that has been the case: not only does Basil II become a referential figure for eleventh-century rulers, but the *Chronographia* portrays him as such in multiple instances throughout the book. Psellos has Zoe remember Basil as she is being sent to exile; she and Isaak are depicted as remembering tales and anecdotes from his legendary reign; and Psellos himself described Basil's reign as the peak of the empire in terms of wealth and stability.[83] Everywhere in the narrative, Basil is equated with prosperity and power – except in the pages that are devoted to Basil himself.

[80] Note to the forthcoming publication in *Estudios Bizantinos*, F. López-Santos Kornberger, 'Reconciliando al genio crítico y al adulador cortesano: Una revisión a la aproximación bipartita de la *Cronografía* de Miguel Pselo y la *Historia* de Miguel Ataliates', *Estudios Bizantinos* 7 (2019) [Forthcoming]; the aforementioned sections are *Chronographia* 6.22-29.
[81] *Chronographia* 6.74.
[82] Bourbouhakis and Nilsson, 'Byzantine Narrative', 268, use book one as an example of clear narrative, as events forced Basil to change his character: 'each part of the narrative contributes to an emerging whole, so that later parts cannot be properly understood or appreciated without knowledge of what came before'.
[83] *Chronographia* 5.22.4-22 (Zoe being sent to exile), 6.158.4-6 (Zoe enjoying anecdotes about Basil); 7.76.5-6 (Isaak recalling anecdotes and sayings about Basil), 6.63.1-2 and 7.52.1-9 (Psellos' praising Basil's accumulation of wealth).

The *Chronographia*'s first book begins without any *prooimion*, with the death of Emperor John Tzimiskes and the accession of the brothers Basil and Constantine to the throne.[84] Psellos praises Constantine's acknowledgement of Basil's superiority and his willingness to allow him to become the factual ruler.[85] However, he introduces a new character: the *parakoimomenos* Basil, a eunuch related to the young emperors who was effectively in control. In the *Chronographia*, the collaboration between the two Basils is depicted as positive.[86] Then Psellos indicates that Basil was once a self-indulgent youngster focused on more leisurely pursuits, but the rebellions of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas made him 'abrupt and irascible'.[87] This leads to the account of the rebellions of Skleros and Phokas: together with the episode of the *parakoimomenos* Basil's fall into disgrace, these stories occupy sections three to twenty-eight, about two thirds of book one in terms of words. Psellos´ story of Basil´s reign reduces key elements of the fabula while giving extreme prominence to these two episodes.[88] Afterwards, sections twenty-nine to thirty-seven describe the emperor's character and outer aspect, noting his austere way of life and the wealth he brought to the Treasury. Although Psellos interleaves his description with digressions about the philosophers of Basil's time, or anecdotes about the emperor's method of campaigning, no particular episode occupies more than a few lines before Psellos changes the topic to a new aspect of his description of Basil.[89]

[84] *Chronographia* 1.1. Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 13: believes that Psellos may have written a *prooimion* to his Chronographia, and maybe removed it for creating a sort of universal story; to that I would argue that book one may be the product of previous accounts, and perhaps was never headed by a *prooimion*; there is something close to a *prooimion*, however, at the beginning of book six: perhaps Psellos felt entitled to, among other literary innovations, fit the *prooimion* whenever he deemed it convenient in his account: *Chronographia* 6.22.
[85] *Chronographia* 1.2.
[86] *Chronographia* 1.3.
[87] *Chronographia* 1.4.2: στρυφνὸς οὗτος δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ ἦθος ἀπεξεσμένος.
[88] On the memory of Basil II during Psellos' time and afterwards: P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (Cambridge 2003).
[89] See appendix five on page 311 below.

Book one does not seem to adhere to the composition methods we have considered up to now in the *Chronographia*. Following the pattern established elsewhere in the text, we would expect Psellos to first introduce Basil's character, and then show the audience how Basil faced key moments of his reign – though it remains curious that the account only mentions Basil's Bulgarian campaigns in passing.

Psellos' story of Basil may sound particularly strange to a modern reader, as its internal structure differs from other episodes in the Chronographia. Stories and characters come and go throughout the book: in one moment we are on the battlefield, then we return to the story of the *parakoimomenos*, allegedly the most important man in the empire but nevertheless absent from the previous third of the story; only to return to 'a second revolt' of Bardas Skleros, which seems to be the same rebellion as before.[90] All of that leads to the final section of the narrative, a description of an emperor who we have already seen in action for several pages. Not only does Psellos offer us information about Basil that was introduced in earlier sections: he is also writing about this emperor's life and deeds in the opposite way to other episodes, where the emperor's depiction comes first. From Romanos III up to Isaak I, Psellos first describes what kind of a person the emperor is, and then proves his point to the audience by narrating how the emperor faced different challenges.[91]

Furthermore, the depiction of Basil changes from one episode to another. The end of the account (except perhaps section thirty), and also section twenty-two, are outwardly positive: Basil chooses an austere lifestyle for his subjects and himself, consequently bringing prosperity to the empire; and his pose is that of an emperor. However, in the passages focused on his

[90] *Chronographia* 1.23-28.
[91] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 23 did not note this peculiarity from book one, and used the beginning of that book as an example of a normal narrative flow in the Chronographia: first the characters of Basil and Constantine are presented (albeit in very few lines) and then events happen around them; C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford 2005) 35 meanwhile wonders of the odd arrangement in the Chronographia, and assumes that describing Basil at the end and not at the beginning falls within the limits of normality.

relationship with the *parakoimomenos*, Psellos presents Basil as blinded by his own anger, who constantly attempted to destroy the lifelong career of the *parakoimomenos.* This man, Psellos remarks, cared for the imperial family to the point of self-sacrifice and was unable to conspire to access to the throne due to his condition as a eunuch.[92]

The message conveyed in the rebellions of Skleros and Phokas is somewhat less clear. The beginning of the episode at section five redirects the audience to the previous point to give an explanation for the rebellion ('διὰ ταῦτα οἱ ἐκείνων ἀνεψιαδεῖς πολέμους κατ' αὐτοῦ σφοδροὺς ἀνερρίπισαν'),[93] but no clear explanation can be found there. The previous sentence says that, once Skleros and Phokas rose in rebellion, Basil decided to destroy them utterly – an odd, cyclical explanation for the rebellion itself. διὰ ταῦτα ('therefore' or 'on this account') could allude to earlier statements: that the young Basil had a luxurious life, or that he shared power with a eunuch. However, none of these reasons echo through the narrative as the book develops: the *parakoimomenos* is presented in a positive light, and the larger rebellion of Phokas does not seem to relate to Basil's youthful weakness, but instead results from his neglect of the inner circle of the emperor. In the words of Psellos:

> He [Phokas] had not betrayed the trust reposed in him: he had entered into an agreement [with Basil], on specific terms, and he had faithfully kept it. So, disgruntled, he broke away in revolt – a revolt more serious and more difficult to counter than the previous one.[94]

The revolt ended badly for Phokas, but Skleros managed to keep on fighting until he could reach an accord with the emperor: Skleros would take precedence immediately after the emperor, and his generals and soldiers would keep their positions.[95] The story ends with the

[92] *Chronographia* 1.3 and 20.
[93] *Chronographia* 1.5.1-2: 'On this account the nephews of these blew up in a bitter war against him'.
[94] *Chronographia* 1.10.7-10: ἅμα δὲ, καὶ μὴ προδεδωκέναι τὴν πίστιν οἰόμενος, ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς προσβᾶσαν καὶ φυλαχθεῖσαν, σὺν τῷ κρατίστῳ μέρει τοῦ στρατοπέδου, βαρυτέραν τε· καὶ χαλεπωτέραν κατὰ τοῦ Βασιλείου τυραννίδα ἀνίστησι.
[95] *Chronographia* 1.26.

reunion between Skleros and Basil, where the former advises the latter on imperial affairs.[96] The account of the rebellion seems to stem from, and conclude with, points about the proximity of powerful, noble men to and within the emperor's inner circle.[97] If that were the case, the διὰ ταῦτα from point five finds a corresponding idea in an even earlier statement at the beginning of point three: 'once invested with supreme power over the Romans, Basil was loath to share his designs with anyone else or to accept advice on the conduct of public affairs'.[98]

Basil ruled on his own, excluding all from the decision-making, and thus Skleros rebelled. The only problem is that three hundred eighty-five words stand between this sentence and our *Διὰ ταῦτα*: and these tell the story of Basil the *parakoimomenos*. In fact, this deviation is noted in the narrative, and contradicts the image of Basil as a young but well-prepared emperor from section two: Basil aims for supreme power but, because of his inexperience, he feels the need to rely on somebody (the *parakoimomenos*).[99] Section four also includes the story about how the rebellions of Skleros and Phokas changed Basil, not making him necessarily more virtuous, but rather prone to anger.[100] His irritability comes up only once more in the narrative, in the account of the fall of the *parakoimomenos*, which not only interrupts the story of the rebellion but, as Barbara Crostini and Catherine Holmes noted, is completely misallocated from a chronological viewpoint.[101]

Holmes detected astonishing similarities in Psellos' and Skylitzes' accounts of the rebellions against Basil. She argued that both authors used a common source, encomiastic

[96] *Chronographia* 1.27-28.
[97] Even further: Psellos only leaves Skleros in *Chronographia* 1.28, as a way to transition into a new topic: we might suppose that the conclusion of the rebellion emphasises the reunion between Basil and the rebel, rather than the latter's departure.
[98] *Chronographia* 1.3.1-3: ὁ δέ γε Βασίλειος, ἤδη τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίαν περιζωσάμενος, ἐβούλετο μὲν μηδένα κοινωνὸν ἔχειν τῶν φροντισμάτων· μὴδὲ περὶ τῶν κοινῶν διοικήσεων σύμβουλον.
[99] *Chronographia* 1.3.
[100] *Chronographia* 1.4.
[101] B. Crostini, 'The Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life', *Byz* 64 (1996) 57-60; Holmes, *Basil II*, 34: according to Yahya's account, the *parakoimomenos* fell in disgrace in 985, while Phokas' defeat happened in 989; Holmes also noted that, after Skleros' defeat, Psellos' account is 'devoid of any factual substance'.

towards Skleros, written after the rebel had come to terms with the emperor Basil, but before his death. She hypothesised that the *enkomion* was created by the Skleros family, intending to explain and legitimise their actions during the rebellion. Psellos might have used that narrative as a source, Holmes added, because of the influence of the Skleroi clan in the court of Constantine IX Monomachos.[102] To Holmes' convincing argument I would simply add (in the lines of my previous commentary to Shepard's research on Skylitzes' 'Source K')[103] that once the *enkomion* was fitted into the *Chronographia* around 1059, the audience may have read it differently. After 1059, the account became a moralising story rather than a praise of the Skleros family.[104]

Assuming that book one depicts a homogeneous model character for later rulers, whilst ignoring these changes in the narrative, has led to peculiar readings of the *Chronographia*. For Kaldellis, the story of the rise and fall of the *parakoimomenos* reflects a Machiavellian message:

> Basil's regime was nothing less than a harsh and absolute autocracy, and yet in the overall argument of Book 1 his supremacy is established without moral challenge (…). [The dismissal of the *parakoimomenos*] is presented with sympathy for the unhappy eunuch but without censure for the monarch (…). The mature Basil is certainly presented as a tyrant in the *Chronographia*, and yet he was also "that Basil

[102] Holmes, *Basil II*, 278-298; in 338-339, Holmes also noted how, in the *Synopsis*, Skylitzes ends up alluding to the blinding of Skleros; Psellos does not mention the tragic end of the rebel, possibly because his narrative is intended to transmit a positive ending, underlining the reconciliation between emperor and rebel once a harmonious state of affairs is recovered.

[103] See page 142 above.

[104] Nevertheless, it is important to note, as Holmes did, that Psellos' epistolary exchanges with members of the Skleros family are attested as late as the 1070s, as noted by Holmes, *Basil II*, 287; Michael Psellos, letters 37, 44, 56 and 63 in ed. E. Kurtz and F. Drexl, *Michaelis Pselli Scripta minora magnam partem adhuc inedita*, vol. 2 (Milan 1941); W. Seibt, *Die Skleroi. Eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie* (Viena, 1976) 94-95; it is worthy of attention the similarities between Psellos' depiction of the rebellion in the *Chronographia* and the *Historia Syntomos*, discussed in W.J. Aerts, *Michaelis Pselli Historia Syntomos* (Berlin and New York, NY 1990) esp. xiii; this is related to Holmes' reading of some episodes within the *Synopsis* as *diegemata*: C. Holmes, 'The Rhetorical Structures of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (Aldershot 2003) 187-200.

> who outshone all other Emperors" (…). There is no contradiction here, and only a shocking conclusion: the Empire's best ruler was a tyrant.[105]

Kaldellis continues by comparing Psellos' approach to that of 'a famous teacher of evil': Machiavelli, 'who insisted than an effective state, capable of protecting its subjects and safeguarding its dominions, could only be based on greed, naked ambition, and a dose of injustice and cruelty.'[106]

The contradictions and narrative changes noted above, however, lead me to argue that some sections of the first book in the *Chronographia* are actually later additions to the book, autonomous stories containing distinct arguments, and addressing points other than the ideal character of Basil's rule. Most of the 'Machiavellian' moves made by Basil come from the story about the *parakoimomenos*, a tale focused not on Basil, but on his loyal servant. The argument of the story comes right at the end, when the now-deceased *parakoimomenos* becomes 'a pillar of remembrance, his life a fine subject for story-tellers, or shall I say a proof of the fickleness of all worldly fortune'.[107] Psellos' words here do not seem far from Kekaumenos' advice: 'If you serve the emperor, be particularly careful of slander against you, and keep your fall (from favour) daily before your eyes. For you don't know what they are plotting behind your back.'[108]

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[105] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 42-43; Kaldellis repeats this argument when presenting Basil II in his eleventh-century monograph: A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, NY and Oxford 2017) 104: 'Psellos presented him as an inhumanly tireless commander, ascetic in a military (not religious) way …. He was aloof, even arrogant, rough, inaccessible, and inscrutable'; this depiction effectively applies to the Basil II that is described in the later sections of book one, but not to the stories concerning the *parakoimomenos* and the rebellion of Skleros and Phokas.

[106] Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 44; Holmes, *Basil II*, 31, underlined the impact Psellos' bipartite division of Basil's reign has had in modern scholarship; she quoted, as example, M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1205-1204* (London and New York, NY 1997 [1985]) 28; see also Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (London 1996) 358-390.

[107] *Chronographia* 1.21.7-8: καὶ γέγονεν ὡς ἀληθῶς στήλη τῷ βίῳ· καὶ διήγημα μέγα· μᾶλλον δὲ παράδειγμα τῆς τῶν ἐν γενέσει εὐμεταβόλου συγχύσεως.

[108] Kekaumenos, *Strategikon* 3.14-16: εἰ δὲ δουλεύεις βασιλεῖ, πρόσεχε καὶ τὴν διαβολήν σου ἀκριβῶς καὶ τὴν πτῶσίν σου πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν σου καθεκάστην ἔχε. οὐκ οἶδας γὰρ τί ὀπίσω σου τεκταίνου; J. Ransohoff, 'Consider the Future as Present: The Paranoid World of Kekaumenos', *Speculum* 93.1 (2018) 77-91, on the perils of doing politics in Byzantium.

Even further to this, the whole account of the rebellions, now consisting of a solid narrative focused on the emperors' need to be accessible to powerful and noble men, may also be a later addition containing an autonomous argument within book one. The key to interpretation is in section twenty-two, which followed the eunuch's downfall (sections eighteen to twenty-one) and precedes the end of Skleros' rebellion (sections twenty-three to twenty-eight). As opposed to the preceding sections, Basil is depicted more positively here: he indeed acted with 'disdain' (ὑπεροπτικῶς) towards others,[109] but also acted in terms of austerity and self-sacrifice for the empire. After the account of the rebellion ends, Psellos explicitly returns to the depiction of the emperor using a similar word game as in section twenty-two.[110] Additionally, the narrative returns to the matter of the emperor's ὑπεροψία (a word only used throughout the *Chronographia* three more times): the ruler behaved with great circumspection towards his subjects.[111] Given these formal and thematic similarities between the 'lonely' section twenty-two (which concerns the description of Basil's rule) and sections twenty-nine and beyond (which returns to the description), one could certainly argue that these sections were once united, or rather, that Psellos made a cut in point twenty-two, and fitted the end of Skleros' rebellion.

The experiment of splitting book one of the *Chronographia* could go even further: is Psellos' *enkomion* to Constantine VIII, the only outrightly positive mention to this emperor in the *Chronographia*, a later addition?[112] Is any later section of the book an amendment as well,

[109] *Chronographia* 1.22.5-6.
[110] *Chronographia* 1.29.3 (ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος); mirroring perhaps 1.22.1-2: Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος, τὴν τῆς βασιλείας ἐπιγνοὺς ποικιλίαν.
[111] *Chronographia* 1.29.4; other mentions to ὑπεροψία in the text are 5.12.9 and 5.13.6 (Michael V criticising John Orphanotrophos' arrogance) and 6.135.4 (describing the arrogance of a barbarian that ascended to a high position in the empire); ὑπεροπτικῶς, the adverb related to the noun ὑπεροψία, only appears in the case mentioned above; there is no trace of the adjective ὑπεροπτικός; in both cases, the emperor is being introduced at the beginning of the paragraph; this feature does not appear in any other allusion to Basil II in the *Chronographia*.
[112] *Chronographia* 1.2; on this matter, I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Der Brief des Kaisers an Phokas', *JÖB* 26 (1977) 103-107 hypothesised that the final section of the *Chronographia*, titled 'γραγὴ τοῦ βασιλέως πρὸς τὸν Φωκᾶν' (*Chronographia* ep. 1-3) constituted a source for Psellos to write about Basil II; also argued in Reinsch's edition and translation of the *Chronographia*: D.R. Reinsch, *Leben der byzantinischen Kaiser (976-1075)* (Berlin 2015)

perhaps set in relation to what Psellos has already added at the beginning? Did Psellos even produce, or expect to complete, a passage on Basil's campaigns, perhaps to be after section thirty of the book?[113] We may never know. But the narrative analysis of the structure of book one of the *Chronographia* allows two conclusions. Firstly, caution must be used when considering the different depictions of Basil. As discussed, book one may not be a united composition, or, alternatively, the peculiarities of its construction might lead us to connect different stories, perhaps even composed at different times. Psellos might have pursued varied goals in different parts of the text, such as using the causes of the Skleros' rebellion to foreshadow Isaak Komnenos' later uprising. Or, perhaps, Psellos used the pre-existent stories of the rebellion and the *parakoimomenos,* once melted together, as a solid basis for constructing his book on Basil.

Secondly, this analysis allows the different characterisations of Basil II to be separated and evaluated individually. They should be considered, not as completely different characters, but as responsive to a shift in the narrative focus, which the audience would note as the pitiful character of the *parakoimomenos* enters and leaves the scene, allowing for minor contradictions. The 'Machiavellian' Basil appears in a history seemingly focused on the figure of the emperor's servant and advisor, a figure sympathetic to many of the intended audience, and probably a reflection of Psellos himself, as was the case with John Orphanotrophos.[114]

862 n. 320; Leidholm, N., 'Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades, and the Fabii: Embellished Genealogies and Contested Kinship in Eleventh-Century Byzantium', *BMGS* 42.3 (2018) 188-189 argues, however, that the text was meant to be referred to Nikephoros Botaneiates, due to his self-representation as a descendant of the Phokas family. Both lines of thought could be right, if we approached Psellos' depiction of Basil II as influenced by the politics of the 1070s.

[113] *Chronographia* 1.30.1-2: after a dissertation about the generation of philosophers that rose at the time of Basil (1.29), Psellos mentions Basil's victory over the barbarians out of the blue: Ὁ δὲ λόγος αὖθις εἰς τὸν βασιλέα ἀναφερέσθω· οὗτος γὰρ ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὸ βάρβαρον ἀνεκάθηρε; further evidence suggests that the *Chronographia* might have been partially formed in reworked, pre-existing materials: A. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι,* vol. 3 *(11ος-12ος αι.)* (Athens 2009) 104-6 and Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship*, 5, pointed out that Psellos' coverage of the defeat of Georgios Maniakes in the *Chronographia* resembles an *enkomion* possibly dated during the reign of Constantine IX, years prior to the completion of the first part of the *Chronographia*.

[114] See pages 124-130 above.

Similarly, the account of the rebellion of Skleros and Phokas may speak to the convenience of paying respect to the powerful provincial aristocrats, an argument that comes up again in Psellos' narration of Isaak's rebellion.[115] Finally, we arrive at the Basil described at the end of the account. He is still the man who subjugated the barbarians and 'humbled the pride and jealousy' of his subjects.[116] However, he is now the character that appears elsewhere in the *Chronographia*: austere in his clothing and his speaking, devoted to serious matters instead of dwelling on unnecessary wealth, and thus, a long-lived, successful ruler who enabled the empire to thrive.[117] Most importantly, he is no longer a character whose absolute tyranny requires no justification:

> [Basil] readily adapted himself no less to the crises of war than to the calm of peace. Really, if the truth be told, he was more of a villain in wartime, more of an emperor in time of peace. Outbursts of wrath he controlled, and like the proverbial 'fire under the ashes', kept anger hid in his heart, but if his orders were disobeyed in war, on his return to the palace he would kindle his wrath and reveal it – terrible then was the vengeance he took on the miscreant.[118]

Therefore, outside of the account of the *parakoimomenos*' (an autonomous story that is more focused on the servant's dramatic fall in disgrace) and the story of the rebellion of Skleros and Phokas (a narrative that moralises on the importance of an understanding between the emperor and the provincial lords), Basil is not presented as a ruthless ruler. He is instead represented as a man who knows what policy is due on each occasion; an emperor of moderation and intellect.

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[115] *Chronographia* 7.1-4; Psellos' emphasis on the emperor's necessity to rely on good advisors instead of ruling alone goes beyond the Chronographia: F. Lauritzen, 'L'autocrate negli encomi imperiali di Pselo', *ZRVI* 49 (2012) 113-125, esp. 115.

[116] *Chronographia* 1.31.1: ἀπὸ τοίνυν ὑπερηφένου καὶ βασκάνου τύχης.

[117] *Chronographia* 1.22 and 30-31.

[118] *Chronographia* 1.34.1-8: καὶ κατάλληλον ἐδίδου καιροῖς τε μαχίμοις· καὶ εἰρηνικαῖς καταστάσεσι. μᾶλλον δὲ, εἰ δεῖ τἀληθὲς ἐρεῖν, πανουργότερος μὲν ἐν πολέμοις ἦν· ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ βασιλικώτερος· καὶ τὰς ὀργὰς ταμιεύων· καὶ ὥσπερ ὑπὸ σποδιᾷ κρύπτων τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῇ, εἴ τινες ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις παρηνομήκασιν, ἀνῆπτε ταύτας καὶ ἀπεκάλυπτεν ἐπαναζεύξας εἰς τὰ βασίλεια· καὶ δεινῶς τηνικαῦτα ἐμνησικάκει τοῖς κακουργήμασι; this separation of characters in periods of war and peace follows earlier discussion on the role of space in the narrative, see pages 189-208 above.

6.2.2. Attaleiates' narrative rollercoaster and the four Romanos Diogenes

One of the features of Psellos' literary techniques in the *Chronographia* is to manipulate his story so that he can oppose delusional appearances and reality. When applied to characters, the contrast is between the 'masks' that individuals wear in society or even just for themselves, and their true *ethos*, which Psellos reveals to us. Such contrast becomes fundamental in the narrative arc of emperors such as Romanos III or Michael V. Romanos has a high opinion of himself, and Psellos devotes his story to the consequences of that delusion. Michael wears a convenient mask of subordination towards the people who made his coronation possible, namely Zoe and John Orphanotrophos, but that mask falls off quickly.[119] Thus, book five of the *Chronographia* essentially narrates Michael's slow descent into tyranny, as he begins to unleash his (according to Psellos) true desires.

Attaleiates proceeds differently. Through the *History*, the narrator claims to reveal the *true meaning* of omens and signs, but characters are not analysed through a prism opposing illusion and reality. Instead, the morality of key decisions, presented as morally clear to the audience, are at the core of the *History*'s message. The shape of Attaleiates' stories follows consequentially. The rhythm adopted by Attaleiates when presenting a given emperor often offers a first, positive portrait of the ruler to the audience, only to then outline his sinful deeds and their consequences. Attaleiates' initial positive remarks of a given emperor tend to provide a 'deep breath before the plunge', the latter being the sinful act that becomes central to the episode. Thus, when analysing the overall structure of a reign in the *History*, it is common to find this sort of 'narrative rollercoaster', a repeated expulsion from Eden for each emperor up to the glorious Nikephoros Botaneiates. Attaleiates bends the fabula, namely the historical events, in order to follow that rule. Unlike Psellos, Attaleiates does not imply that any of the

[119] *Chronographia* 5.5-6 and 15.

facets of the emperor reveal his 'true colours': while the *Chronographia* focuses on describing an emperor's *ethos*, the central focus of the *History* remains on the actions rather than the subjects.

Scholars have rarely noted this feature in modern analysis of the *History*.[120] In particular, Alexander Kazhdan's analysis of the narrator's depiction of the emperors misses this narrative feature. Consequently, Kazhdan often labels Attaleiates' emperors as ambiguous figures, as a blurred image of a moving subject. Kazhdan notes that Attaleiates' Michael V first shows 'admirable fairness and generosity, but later proved to be ungrateful and unjust'.[121] However, Attaleiates does not reveal a more faithful reproduction of Michael's character by exposing his crimes. As described in chapter three, Attaleiates first presents Michael as an overall virtuous ruler, with only a few ominous signs anticipating his violent end. Then, Attaleiates underlines how Michael's deposition derives from a single, sinful action (revolting against his benefactor), and he is thereby punished by a morally driven, superhuman force.[122]

As discussed earlier, Attaleiates' account of Constantine IX adds a further level of complexity through the addition of smaller stories that mirror later events, but still, this emperor is ultimately punished for his sins as well.[123] His successor, Michael VI, is presented as the sacrificial victim of the usurper Isaak Komnenos more than as an emperor possessing a distinct

[120] Ljubarskij subtly noted this feature when analysing Attaleiates' depiction of Romanos IV, in I.N. Ljubarskij, 'Miguel Ataliates y Miguel Pselo: ensayo de una breve comparación' *Erytheia*, 16 (1995) 94: 'De esta manera, Ataliates comienza el relato sobre Romano con un tono encomiástico; lo concluye casi al estilo de una vida de santo y, entretando, manifiesta un sentimiento profundamente humano hacia el emperador, a quien compadece, alaba y censura'; Ljubarskij acknowledges the swift on the depiction of Romanos, but labels the whole process as a 'human sentiment' since it combines sorrow, praise and criticism, but he does not connect this feature of Romanos' description to other episodes in the *History*; instead, Ljubarskij labelled the character representation of the *History* as 'more canonical' than Psellos': Ljubarskij, 'Miguel Ataliates y Miguel Pselo', 92.
[121] Kazhdan, 'The Social Views', 32.
[122] *History* 10-17/8.22-14.16; for a more detailed analysis of Attaleiates' views on Michael V, see pages 111-118 above.
[123] *History* 17-51/14.17-41.8; the aforesaid rule on the capital role of sinful actions applies to the summary of Constantine's reign included at the end of the account: 50-51/40.13-41.8; I debated these issues in chapters 3 and 4 above.

narrative arc – and because of this, Michael's portrait becomes an exception to the rule.[124] Kazhdan describes Isaak's depiction as 'extremely complicated' due to the combination of praise and criticism, especially concerning his fiscal policy.[125] Both Kazhdan and Krallis conclude that Attaleiates must be biased in favour of Isaak – higher revenues were fundamental at that time. Therefore, Krallis disregards Attaleiates' criticism towards Isaak, reading it as superficial.[126] However, the same narrative rule applies here: despite Attaleiates' presentation of Isaak as an undesirable usurper, his account begins with some praise in preparation for his later description of Isaak's sinful decision to exile the patriarch.[127] Something similar occurs with the depiction of Michael VII: even the most negatively portrayed ruler in the *History* enjoys some momentary praise before his descent into sinfulness. Despite his criticism of Michael's decision to blind Romanos IV,[128] the first measures of Michael's government are presented as overall positive, mostly thanks to John the *protosynkellos*.[129] These positive remarks about Michael's rule appear on the first page of text about his reign, following Romanos' death and preceding the introduction of the eunuch, Nikephoritzes – the malevolent advisor who, according to Attaleiates, corrupted the realm thanks to Michael's inaction.[130] Both Isaak and Michael are introduced as corrupt figures before their accounts are properly started, and yet Attaleiates introduces some respite at the beginnings of their respective accounts,

[124] *History* 51-59/41.9-47.23; see section on Isaak and Michael in chapter 3.
[125] Kazhdan, 'Social Views', 33.
[126] Kazhdan, 'Social Views', 33; D. Krallis, 'Sacred Emperor, Holy Patriarch: A New Reading of the Clash between Emperor Isaakios I and Patriarch Michael Keroularios in Attaleiates' *History*', *BSl* 67 (2009) 169-190.
[127] *History* 59-62/47.24-49.27; see chapter 3 for further discussion on Attaleiates' depiction of Isaak.
[128] *History* 176-177/136.1-137.3.
[129] *History* 180/139.7-21; Speros Vryonis noted Attaleiates' positive remarks towards Michael, but did not read it as part of the narrative's flow: S. Vryonis, 'Michael Psellus, Michael Attaleiates: The Blinding of Romanus IV at Kotyaion (29 June 1072) and His Death on Proti (4 August 1072)', in C. Dendrinos, J. Harris, E. Harvalia-Crook, and J. Herrin (eds.), *Porphyrogenita: Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides* (Aldershot 2003) 5: 'from the introduction to the reign of Michael in his history it is obvious that Attaleiates has positive, as well as negative, things to say about Michael VII'; see also H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner,* vol. 1 (Munich 1978) 382-389.
[130] *History* 180-183/139.21-141.20.

possibly as a way to make the following crimes all the more dramatic. Thus, Attaleiates' construction of the narrative emphasises morality over character description.

When analysing Attaleiates' depiction of Constantine X, Isaak's successor, Kazhdan again overlaps different moments from the narrative, trying to capture Attaleiates' 'moving object' in a still picture. In his analysis of both the *History* and the *Continuation* of Skylitzes, Kazhdan reflects on the fact that, for Skylitzes, the Roman victory against the Uzes depended on Constantine's prayers. Attaleiates does not consider Constantine a pious ruler, Kazhdan concluded.[131] However, Attaleiates also depicts a divine force saving Constantine from a threatening rebellion.[132] Why would Attaleiates portray the divine interceding in favour of an impious ruler?

Attaleiates' depiction of Constantine confirms the aforementioned rule with even further clarity: the emperor is *not yet* impious when the divine intervention occurs. He is not hiding any 'true colours' either: the narrative does not present his initial good actions through a cynical prism.[133] Once Constantine accesses the throne, he gives a public speech, in which he promises to behave extraordinarily well as a ruler.[134] Attaleiates adds no mockery to this declamation: Constantine's words constitute a model of what a ruler should say – and do. In fact, the 'divine' rescue of Constantine from a terrible rebellion in the city proves to the audience that Constantine is following the right path for an emperor. Attaleiates possibly arranged the declamation together with the account of the failed rebellion as to show the political situation corresponding with a God-beloved ruler. Before the rebellion, Attaleiates' Constantine lived by the imperial ideal. Only afterwards, does Attaleiates mention a number of reforms based on the emperor's greed – these are then followed by accounts of military disasters and several

[131] Kazhdan, 'Social Views', 35.
[132] *History* 73/58.15-19.
[133] *History* 71/56.23-57.11.
[134] *History* 70-71/56.11-23.

signals of divine disapproval, only appeased by the arrival of Romanos IV on the imperial scene.[135] Once again, Attaleiates structured his account around the eventual moral decay of the ruler in question and the cataclysmic consequences of his sins.

The reign of Romanos IV, one of the longest sections in the *History*, is structured as a expanded version of this model. Romanos' narrative arc rises from his portrayal as a glorious military hero who seems capable of solving the empire's problems once and for all, to an image of a sad man who loses the war and the throne, only to be finally slaughtered by the Michael VII and his followers. Like the sixth book of Psellos' *Chronographia*, the relative length of Romanos' account in the *History* can be mostly explained by the advantageous position of Attaleiates as a member of the imperial expeditions against the Seljuk Turks, including the battle of Manzikert. Attaleiates' first-hand, detailed accounts of the campaigns rank among the most studied section of the *History*.[136] Similarly, Romanos' death becomes the narrative's dramatic peak for modern audiences of the *History*, as opposed to Botaneiates' *enkomion* at the very end of the book.[137]

Still, scholars have misinterpreted the account, seeking a single defining element of Romanos' character.[138] Kazhdan compiled both positive and negative traits in his research.[139] He argued that 'judged alongside the "ideal" paradigm, the character of Romanos IV is thus decidedly lopsided: one virtue – military excellence – overshadows everything else, despite the

[135] *History* 76-78/60.21-62.15.
[136] See, for instance, S. Vrionis, 'The Greek and Arabic Sources on the Battle of Manzikert, 1071 A.D.', in S. Vryonis, *Byzantine Studies: Essays on the Slavic World and the Eleventh Century* (New Rochelle, NY 1992) 136-140.
[137] I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates: Historia* (Madrid 2002) xv.
[138] Vryonis, 'Michael Psellus, Michael Attaleiates', 3-14; A. Vratimos, 'Two Remarks on Michael Attaleiates' Account of the Preliminaries in Manzikert', *Symbolae Osloensis* 91.1 (2017) 159-169.
[139] Kazhdan, 'Social Views', 35-36: collected what he considered to be Romanos' virtues from the following pages (according to Bonn edition): 101-102, 104, 106, 108, 114, 163, 176 (mostly concerned with military prowess, but also bravery and nobility); Romanos' defects can be found at: 127, 128, 144, 152, 153 (cruelty and meanness).

fact that the emperor was defeated at Manzikert and perished tragically in civil war'.[140] Krallis argues that Romanos' account is the climatic peak of the *History,* which Attaleiates presented as a response to the values expressed in Psellos' *Chronographia*.[141] According to Krallis, Attaleiates' laudatory view of Romanos' virtues reflects the author's political propositions, and suggests that he used tactical errors as a way to explain the later disaster.[142] Krallis' approach is more accurate than Kazhdan's inasmuch as it recognises Attaleiates' focus on actions, rather than in character-description. He convincingly links the characters of Romanos and Rouselios, both unfairly mistreated by the tyrant Michael VII.[143] However, Krallis' ambivalent position towards the role of omens and superhuman forces in the account, leaves large sections of Attaleiates' narrative of Romanos' reign unexplained.[144] Tactics occupy a key space in earlier sections of Romanos' account but, as the dramatic story of Manzikert slowly unfolds, omens demonstrating divine disapproval take centre stage. Moreover, Krallis repeated Kazhdan's tendency to try to define Romanos by one single aspect, and in not considering that Romanos' story is divided into unfolding stages.[145] As we shall see, Attaleiates' Romanos is and is not egotistical. It depends on where we are in the flow of the narrative, since the centre of the story is not on Romanos' *ethos* but on the ongoing moralistic scheme of rise and fall. Romanos also falls from the altar of hope Attaleiates made for him in the first pages of his account, only to become a pitiful character at the end.

[140] Kazhdan, 'Social Views', 36.
[141] D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012) 77.
[142] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 79-100.
[143] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 165: 'taken together, the two accounts, in effect, suggest that the Doukas clan had thwarted the efforts of two brave men to save the Roman east'; I completely agree with Krallis here: the attention in the passages that describe the fall of Romanos and Rouselios is not on judging these men, but on shaming the Doukai for their malevolence.
[144] See pages 58-64 and 178-181 above.
[145] Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates,* 84-85; in pages 84-93 Krallis compares aspects from both works in depicting Romanos IV: judging his rush into battle, his eagerness or not to listen to good advice, and his treatment of empress Eudokia; on Attaleiates' criticism towards Romanos: Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 99.

Since Attaleiates neatly structured the account following a four-staged narrative arc (accomplishments-sins-punishment-lament), there are four 'Romanoi' in the *History*.[146] Romanos' first glorious campaign roughly covers from pages 101 to 122 in the Bonn edition. This Romanos is portrayed as a suitable ruler in an occasionally encomiastic tone. Romanos, Attaleiates indicates, appeared at the end of winter, rising from the land of Saint Basil of Caesarea, namely Kappadokia. Basil´s church has just been desecrated by the Turks – Romanos becomes an implicit avenger of that desecration.[147] In this first section, Romanos shows military expertise but also the capacity for self-sacrifice in the harsh frontier lands. The emperor recognised the gravity of the situation and distanced himself from any comfort in order to inspire his troops and lead the Romans to victory.[148]

The 'second Romanos' corresponds with his flawed second campaign, which covers page 123 to page 138.[149] The emperor's actions are shown to be the antithesis of the former successful campaign. The section opens with the Roman attack on the camp of Latin rebels led by Krispinos during Easter. As the Roman army is defeated and some of the leaders captured, Attaleiates introduces his opinion on the episode through Krispinos' lips. The Latin leader condemned:

> the impiety of the Romans who in such an awesome and marvellous day, the feast of feasts, took up arms to shed Christian blood on a day when the Orthodox were not allowed to assault even foreigners and thus make a mockery of the grace of the Resurrection.[150]

[146] See appendix six on page 312 below.
[147] The Turkish raid on Kappadokia and Romanos' depiction as rising from the same land, respectively: *History* 93-94/74.16-75.1, and 101/80.16-20.
[148] See further detail in the section on the frontier in chapter 5, pages 189-208 above; Romanos' first depiction corresponds to the following pages: *History* 101-122/80.16-96.2.
[149] *History* 122-138/96.3-107.29.
[150] *History* 124/97.8-12: κατέγνω γὰρ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀσέβειαν, ὅτι ἐν τοιαύτῃ φοβερᾷ καὶ θαυμασίᾳ ἡμέρᾳ, ἥτις ἑορτῶν ἐστιν ἑορτή, τὰς χεῖρας κατὰ χριστιανικῶν αἱμάτων ἐξώπλισαν, μὴ ἐφειμένον ὂν ἐν ταύτῃ τοῖς ὀρθοδόξοις μηδὲ κατὰ ἀλλοφύλων ἐπεξιέναι καὶ τὴν χάριν ὑβρίζειν τῆς Ἀναστάσεως.

Afterwards, as proof of good faith, Krispinos liberates the Roman prisoners and asks for an imperial pardon in return.[151] From that episode onwards, the text becomes a critique of Romanos, a lazy emperor who disregards his martial responsibilities, while committing several acts of impiety and making other errors.[152] The third section of the account, from page 138 to 159, describes the ill-omened road to Manzikert. While Krallis focuses on the military manoeuvres of Romanos, Attaleiates drives the audience's attention to several signals of divine disapproval.[153] Repetitive omens become the connecting thread that runs throughout the rest of the account, and are the preludes to a well-known disaster.

As Romanos marches to his defeat and capture, Attaleiates purposefully marks a change in the tone of the narrative: 'from this point on our narrative becomes less bearable on account of the terrible misfortunes, extreme shame, and most grievous catastrophe that befell the Romans'.[154] The fourth and last depiction of Romanos aims to move the audience towards sympathising with his disgrace instead of insisting on his guilt.[155] If anything, Romanos is praised for his stoic, saint-like acceptance of the divine trial set on his shoulders – he is no longer measured as an emperor but as a saint, in the manner of Patriarch Keroularios or Michael VI earlier in the story. They also were made martyrs, in that case of Isaak's tyranny.[156] Indeed, this section of the narrative is mostly focused on criticising the actions of the new government led by Michael VII. The positive attitude of Alp Arslan towards Romanos and the relatively hopeful tone of the narrative – Romanos IV is about to return to the Roman heartland safely –

[151] *History* 124-125/97.16-30.
[152] More detail on Romanos' flaws on the frontier on notes 53 and 175 from chapter 5, on pages 198 and 231.
[153] The role of omens in the *History* is recounted on pages 178-181.
[154] *History* 160/123.24-26: τὸ δ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε δυσάντητος ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος διὰ τὸ ἐργῶδες τῶν ἀτυχημάτων καὶ λίαν ἀπόφημον καὶ τὴν εἰς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ἐπισυμβᾶσαν χαλεπωτάτην δυσκληρίαν.
[155] See, for instance, the scene of Romanos' blinding on footnote 181 from chapter 5, page 233.
[156] See pages 99-110 above.

serve as a contrast to the later ingratitude of Michael VII, who is pointed by Attaleiates as the main responsible of Romanos' disgrace.[157]

Thus, the version of Romanos who is 'the hope of the Romans' lasts for about a quarter of the narrative. He is followed by a second Romanos, 'the sinner', and a third Romanos 'the ill-omened', until God's final retribution makes a pitiable figure out of him, an introduction to the darkest hour of the empire in Attaleiates' view. This four-fold approach solves apparent contradictions in the account. Pérez Martín noted the 'intellectual inconsistency' of Attaleiates as he first declared, while narrating the reign of Constantine IX, that all prosperity must be attributed to God while men are responsible for their disgraces; but later proclaimed that 'victories and defeats depend of the man in charge' during his account of Romanos.[158] Both points of view correspond to different moments of the narrative: namely, the second group of statements belong to the first section of the Romanos account. In that case, Attaleiates wished to underline the importance of the leader Romanos as a military saviour, laying the groundwork for a juxtaposition with his later criticism of Romanos' actions. Similarly, Kazhdan's misunderstanding of Attaleiates' portrayal of Romanos is clarified. The pile of positive remarks about Romanos gathered by Kazhdan correspond, exclusively, to the first and the last section of the account – the heroic Romanos and the martyr – while the criticism comes from the two middle sections. Romanos' account is not skewed towards his military achievements. Firstly, Romanos' military failures quickly follow his initial success in the narrative once the second campaign begins.[159] Moreover, Attaleiates' praise and criticism of Romanos does not differ from his treatment of other imperial figures in the *History*, despite the frontier setting of most of the scenes. This is confirmed by the four-staged rhythm of the narrative, a variant of the

[157] *History* 164-165/127.4-128.8; L.R. Cresci, 'Anticipazione e possibilità: moduli interpretativi della storia di Michele Attaliata' *Ιταλοελληνικα* 3 (1993) 84 argued likewise.
[158] Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates*, xvii-xviii; *History* 87/69.4-10 for the first mention; 108/85.19-22 and 119/94.4-6 for Attaleiates' statements pointing at the ruler as the cause for prosperity or decline.
[159] *History* 122/96.3.

'rollercoaster' between ideal rule and later fall into sin, which activates divine retribution against him.

Thus, Romanos' depiction in the *History* contains four distinct phases, of the same approximate length (between fifteen and twenty pages each in Bekker's *edition prima*). The account's division is certainly similar to that of the aforementioned account of Mesarites, or Isaak's depiction in the *Chronographia*, as discussed in chapter five. As in those cases, the division may be justified by a desire to frame the work, or even to split the account into pieces to be read aloud, or discussed, separately. This might also be the reason for the astonishing regularities in Attaleiates' thematic division of his account.[160] More importantly, Attaleiates' neat thematic separation of Romanos' account highlights his moralistic, action-focused message, which encourages the Romans and their emperors to follow a rigid code of behaviour, and to think about divine retribution. The only account where this narrative shift is absent – apart from Michael VI – is that of Botaneiates. That absence could be read at Botaneiates' court either as a celebration of the arrival of a perfect candidate for the throne, or as an implicit reminder to the emperor of what could happen to the ruler who distances themselves from the imperial ideal: Botaneiates might just be situated at the beginning of his own narrative circle of rise and fall.

6.2.3. John Skylitzes' Attaleiates: time and Komnenian vindication

The last section of this chapter focuses on the *Continuation* of John Skylitzes, possibly the least studied of the Byzantine eleventh-century historical accounts. As commented on in previous chapters, this academic neglect derives from the presumed lack of originality of the *Continuation* when compared with Attaleiates' *History*, its main source. Scholars have already

[160] See appendix seven, on page 313 below, and compare the number of words in 1.2.1. and 1.2.2.; 2.1.3. and 2.2.1.; 3.3.1. and 3.3.2.; 3.4.4. and 3.4.5. and 3.4.6.; 3.5.3. and 3.5.4.; and 5.3.2. and 5.3.3.

examined those bits of historical information mentioned by Skylitzes that are absent from the *History* or the *Chronographia*.[161] However, researchers equally acknowledged that most of the account follows the structure of the *History*, and thus reveals few surprises. Furthermore, Skylitzes' additions and omissions often correlate with what the narrator stated in the *prooimion* of the *Synopsis*, namely that he would avoid partiality towards specific characters.[162] Consequently, one could explain Skylitzes' omissions of either encomiastic proclamations or inflammatory invectives as part of the narrator's quest for impartiality.[163] The deletion or abbreviation of Attaleiates' digressions or first-hand accounts could also be due to Skylitzes' attempts to reframe the *History* according to the perceived canons of the historical genre.[164] Likewise, Skylitzes' additions often introduce factual data (at least in appearance), such as names, character descriptions, and some of the characters' more memorable sayings.[165] Approaching the account as a watered-down version of the *History* discourages deeper examination. Thus, in the case of the *Continuation*, whereas some trees have been analysed, the forest remains largely unexplored.

In contrast to this approach, I would argue that Skylitzes produced an original narrative that portrays the Komnenian family under a relatively benevolent light, as opposed to his promises of impartiality in the *prooimion*. The key to understanding the depth of Skylitzes'

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[161] M.S. Baldrich López, *Nicéforo Brienio: Materia de Historia* (Granada 2012) 46-57 compared Bryennios' account with the *Continuation*; E.Tsolakis, *Η Συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας του Ιωάννου Σκυλίτση* (Thessaloniki 1968) 61-72.

[162] B. Flusin, 'Re-Writing History: John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*', in Wortley, J. (ed.), *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057* (Cambridge 2010) xii-xxxiii.

[163] Just to refer a couple of examples, Skylitzes mostly follows Attaleiates' account both in the moment of the proclamation of Romanos IV as emperor, and at the very end of the account; however, substantial encomiastic sections are removed or drastically abbreviated by Skylitzes, including the overly positive depiction of Botaneiates as a fair law maker; for Romanos' case: *History* 101/80.12-21 and *Continuation* 124.1-3; Botaneiates' sections in the *History* 312-322/239.18-248.5 are practically absent in the *Continuation*, if anything they are vaguely connected to the emperor's depiction as simple and overly generous in 185.28-186.30.

[164] For example, Skylitzes does not include Attaleiates' dramatic account on the fall of Ani in his account of Constantine X: *History* 79-82/63.13-65.26; the account illustrates the effect of Constantine's policies, but Skylitzes could argue that the tale effectively halted the narrative by focusing on the suffering of a relatively unimportant community – although Attaleiates tries to underline Ani's importance as a populous city at the very beginning of the account.

[165] Examples of this practice concerning the first two emperors from the account: *Continuation* 108.23-111.8 for Isaak and Aikaterine; 118.18-119.4 for Constantine X, in this case taken from the *Chronographia* 7a.29.

edition of his materials cannot be found exclusively by delineating every episode borrowed, or omitted, from the *History*. Instead, it is more fruitful to analyse the alterations in terms of the rhythm of the story. While the facts included in the *Continuation* do not radically differ from those in the *History*, the story's shift in the attention bestowed upon a given episode leads to a substantially different reading of the events as portrayed in the *History*. To cite an example of this, set in the sole reign of Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa, Skylitzes includes the name of Botaneiates as leading an ultimately defeated army in the war against the Turks. Attaleiates mentions the future salvific emperor a few lines later with praise, but omits his name as the general responsible for the previous defeat.[166] Immediately afterwards, Attaleiates argues that the empire is in need of a male ruler:

> The aforementioned Botaneiates was deemed the most noteworthy candidate, who outshone the others as the sun outshines the stars. But envious resentment and an unjust decision put off, at that time, what was right, and another relative of his was preferred for reasons that remain perhaps inscrutable to us mortals – such was the will of God.[167]

However, Skylitzes simplifies the story and destroys Attaleiates' argument along the way: 'Botaneiates was deemed a most worthy candidate, as were many others, yet it was the divine will that triumphed.'[168] His edition of the source seems anything but naïve: the story, the hero, and the arguments have changed, effectively forming a new and original narrative.

The use of small but significant changes in the narrative time displayed in the *Continuation* are not very different from what we can observe in the *Synopsis*. There, Skylitzes attributed the elimination of the *allelengyon* tax to Romanos III, although Yahya of Antioch dated this event during the reign of Romanos' predecessor, Constantine VIII. Skylitzes acknowledged Constantine's attempt to supress the tax, but applauded Romanos for finishing

[166] *History* 95/75.19-76.19; *Continuation* 120.17-121.8.
[167] *History* 96/76.22-27: ἐψηφίζετο μὲν ἀξιολογώτατος ὁ ῥηθεὶς Βοτανειάτης ὡς διαφέρων τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον ἀστέρων ἥλιος, ὁ δὲ φθόνος καὶ ἡ ἄδικος κρίσις ἀνεβάλετο μὲν τότε τὸ δέον, ἕτερον δὲ συγγενέα τούτου ἀντεψηφίσατο δι' αἰτίας ἴσως ἀπορρήτους ἀνθρώποις, οἷα τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ κρίματα.
[168] *Continuation* 121.11-12: ἐψηφίζετο μὲν ἀξιολογώτατος ὁ Βοτανειάτης καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί, νικᾷ δὲ ὅμως ἡ θεία βουλή·

the job.[169] Similarly to Psellos, Skylitzes noted the oppression that resulted from Romanos' project to build the monastery around the church dedicated to Mary Peribleptos; however, whilst Psellos dedicated a lengthy digression to the topic, Skylitzes fitted a small miracle story immediately afterwards, concerning Romanos' restoration of the Theotokos at Blachernai. Therefore, although Skylitzes included some criticism of Romanos' building policy, the criticism is overshadowed by the miracle.[170] The internal organisation of the accounts of Constantine VIII and Romanos III, especially in their first lines, also conveys a subtle but persuasive message on who was a good emperor and who was not. For instance, the list of the people Romanos saved from injustice mirrors the earlier list of the subjects Constantine punished, and Constantine's zeal in gathering taxes contrasts with Romanos' generosity towards the poor and the elimination of the *allelegyon*. Constantine's behaviour is followed by natural disasters, while prosperity blossomed in the time of Romanos.[171] Constantine is confirmed to be a nefarious ruler: did Skylitzes portray him that way because of his treatment of Nikephoros Komnenos, ancestor of the contemporary Alexios Komnenos, as has been argued?[172]

The key test for us to understand the impact of Skylitzes' edition of his sources, and the pro-Komnenian bias given to the new narrative, relies on a comprehensive analysis of the first reign depicted in the account: Isaak Komnenos, uncle of the later emperor Alexios. Although

[169] *Synopsis* 374.63-375.68; Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, ed. I. Kratchovsky and tr. F. Michaeu and G. Troppeau in *Patrologia Orientalis* 47 (1997) 483.
[170] *Synopsis* 384.15-28.
[171] *Synopsis* 370-376; however, bad omens appear shortly after in the reign of Romanos III, as discussed on pages 181185; these ominous signals, namely the comets rising from the four corners of the world, conclude during the reign of Michael IV, harshly criticised by Skylitzes: these omens show how, not only the reigns of Constantine VIII and Romanos III are thematically connected in the *Synopsis*, but the narrative keeps some cohesion between Romanos' reign and that of his successor Michael IV; contrarily, as discussed on page 70, A. Laiou, 'Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes', *DOP* 46 (1992) 165-176, suggested that Skylitzes mostly copied one single source for the reigns of Constantine and Romanos – did Skylitzes himself fit the ominous signals in Romanos' reign, or did he combined several sources for creating an account on his reign?: on this matter, see Lilie, ''Fiktive realität', 387-397; S.P. Todt, 'Herrscher im Schatten: Konstantin VIII. (960/961-1028)', *Thetis* 7 (2000) 93-105.
[172] See note 235 from chapter 2, page 142.

the *Continuation* ends before the Komnenian *coup* puts Botaneiates' reign to end, its beginning covers the story of the first of the Komnenoi. The analysis of these episodes provides a striking contrast to Attaleiates' views of Isaak. In contrast with Krallis' analysis, which hypothesised veiled support of Isaak in Attaleiates' *History*, I have argued that the narrative, though initially positive, ultimately castigates Isaak for his usurpation and the exile of the patriarch Michael Keroularios.[173] Attaleiates' narrative presents a victorious Isaak who, after a divisive and immoral civil war, is crowned by an opportunistic patriarch, who changed sides in the war for the sake of convenience. As customary in the *History*, Attaleiates first mentions Isaak's positive deeds. He offers a generous amount of autonomy to Keroularios in the running and control of Hagia Sophia, gathers taxes appropriately, and counteracts overgrown and abusive monastic institutions. Then the episode of the patriarch's exile occupies much of the space dedicated to Isaak's reign: Keroularios is indeed unfair in his treatment of Isaak, Attaleiates argues, but the emperor's reaction was manifestly sinful and inappropriate.[174] Keroularios dies in exile, and the emperor brings his body back to Constantinople, where a miracle concerning Keroularios' hand confirms his sanctity. Attaleiates then narrates Isaak's mildly successful (according to Attaleiates) campaign in the west, followed by a series of catastrophic natural disasters and ominous portents – which, again according to Attaleiates, Isaak ignored. Isaak then falls ill, cedes the throne to his colleague, Constantine, and becomes a monk before dying. Attaleiates mentions the apparition of moisture in Isaak's sarcophagus as a dubious sign, and summarises the different interpretations from various onlookers: either it shows Isaak's punishment in hell or it was a proof of divine pardon – for a reader of the *History*, it would probably be the former.

Skylitzes' narrative follows a similar structure to that of Attaleiates, and yet the message changes in favour of Isaak. Isaak's sins are nuanced (though not erased) while the narrator fills

[173] See pages 101-105 and 178-181 above.
[174] *History* 62-66/49.28-53.4.

the account with snippets of praise and exculpatory arguments. In the initial lines of the account, Skylitzes minimises the presence of the patriarch in Isaak's new government. He first omits the coronation of Isaak by Keroularios, and then reduces the number of words describing Isaak's concessions to Hagia Sophia and the patriarch from 107 to 75.[175] While Attaleiates introduces concessions highlighting the patriarch´s prominence, Skylitzes nuances the tone of his source.[176] Instead, the narrative includes short 'cameos' of the empress Aikaterini and Katakalon Kekaumenos. Overall, Skylitzes reduces the patriarch's role in Isaak's accession to the throne. Later in the narrative, Skylitzes puts the following words in Keroularios' mouth: 'I built you, oven, and I can take you apart!'[177] While these words would make sense in the *History*, Skylitzes' depiction carefully downplays the patriarch's role in the coup, both before and after Isaak's arrival to the palace. Likewise, Skylitzes' mention of the coins showing an armed Isaak who ascribed his position not to God but to his own military prowess sounds slightly less critically after reading the military-focused account of the civil war from the *Synopsis*, which consisted of praising the good tactician over other failed attempts at usurpation.[178]

Skylitzes also allots space to praise Isaak's internal reforms, even introducing a quote from Demosthenes that summarised the importance of money.[179] Isaak's policy towards monasteries, if somewhat abridged, is nevertheless legitimised in this narrative. However, we find deeper changes in the episode concerning the patriarch's exile. Overall, the importance of this incident in judging Isaak's reign is lessened in the *Continuation*: from about 40% of the text dedicated to Isaak in the *History* to 10% in Skylitzes' account. Furthermore, if we split the episode between two main themes, namely the initial provocations of the patriarch and the

[175] See appendices seven, eight, and nine on pages 313-315.
[176] *History* 60/48.12.
[177] *Continuation* 104.26-105.1: Ἐγὼ σὲ ἔκτισα, φοῦρνε, καὶ ἐγὼ νὰ σὲ χαλάσω.
[178] *Continuation* 103.3.4.
[179] *Continuation* 103.20: ὧν οὐδὲν ἄνευ κατὰ τὸν ῥήτορα περαίνεται.

emperor's decision to exile him, Skylitzes expands the former whilst drastically contracting the latter. The relatively vague arrogance of the patriarch, as recounted in the *History*, becomes specific acts of heterodoxy and tyranny in Skylitzes' work: in addition to his threat to Isaak, Skylitzes has Keroularios begin to wear purple shoes and to discuss the proximity, even superiority, of his position in respect to the imperial one.[180] Attaleiates explains Isaak's reaction as a gateway to escape Keroularios' criticism.[181] In contrast Skylitzes tells us that Isaak, despite 'biting his tongue', finally resolved 'to act rather than be acted upon'.[182] Skylitzes' literary efforts push the story towards legitimising Isaak's decision. The scene of the exile itself confirms this tendency. Whereas Attaleiates contrasts the pious ceremony attended by the patriarch with Isaak's evil intentions, Skylitzes simplifies and effectively 'neutralises' the dramatic preparation of the scene. While Attaleiates represented a priest distracting the patriarch before his arrest, Skylitzes plainly states that some Varangians sent the patriarch off to exile. Both accounts mention Isaak´s decision to send an embassy of bishops to ask Keroularios to resign. However, whereas Attaleiates qualifies some of Isaak´s supporters as 'flatterers', Skylitzes defines the ambassadors as the 'more learned' individuals from among a council of metropolitans.[183] In the *History*, the envoys are roundly defeated by Keroularios' arguments; Skylitzes instead explains the patriarch's rejection of the envoys as a matter of pride.[184] Attaleiates depicted Keroularios as a saint-like figure who 'embraced his humiliation, becoming his own accuser', until he was finally summoned by God.[185] Isaak is thrice depicted as a repentant figure in the *History,* while Skylitzes only mentions the emperor's remorse, briefly, when Keroularios died. Clearly, Skylitzes portrays the story of the patriarch and Isaak

[180] *Continuation* 104.21-105.5.
[181] *History* 62/50.6.10.
[182] *Continuation* 105.5-6: Ταῦτα δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐνωτιζόμενος ὑπ' ὀδόντα λαλούμενα ἔσπευσε μᾶλλον δρᾶσαι ἢ παθεῖν.
[183] *History* 64-65/51.26-28; *Continuation* 105.15-18.
[184] *Continuation* 105.18-20.
[185] *History* 64/51.14-16.

in favour of the Komnenian emperor. Read independently from its source, it tells the story of an out-of-place patriarch receiving due punishment from an emperor, who then took mercy on him and gave his mortal remains an appropriate burial.

After Keroularios' death, Skylitzes expands on the story concerning the appointment of the new patriarch, Constantine Leichoudes. Besides praising the appointment – which, at least in Psellos' opinion, makes amends for the problems with Keroularios[186] – Skylitzes adds the story of how Isaak obtains some titles from the new patriarch, threatening bureaucratic complications if Leichoudes does not collaborate.[187] As in the account of the civil war and other many episodes, Skylitzes' narrative seems to tolerate emperors twisting their subjects' arms, as long as they do not break them. In comparison, Zonaras' version of events pours further blame on Isaak: he wishes to take the titles 'for himself' and therefore 'came up with a scheme full of wickedness'.[188] We find no explicit criticism of Isaak in Skylitzes' version. Similarly, Skylitzes' account of Isaak's military expedition closely follows the *History*. However, where Attaleiates finally states that the preceding calamities, or at least the three which occurred during Isaak's reign, were ominous signs, the *Continuation* adds a pious remark: Isaak thanked God for the outcome and built a church in Blachernai dedicated to the protomartyr Thekla in response.[189] While the *History* heavily relies on criticising emperors for their errors first, and then omitting the evidence of divine displeasure, Skylitzes included a pious response to the omen, which effectively realigns the significance of the episode.

Skylitzes included different materials in the final section of Isaak's account, confirming the benign traits of Isaak and his family. He reiterated the piety behind Isaak's renunciation of

[186] *Chronographia* 7.67.1-2.
[187] *Continuation* 106.7-17.
[188] *Epitome* 670.6-671.4.
[189] *Continuation* 107.27-108.1.

the throne and his entry into monastic life: the narrative copies Attaleiates' words almost *verbatim* but adds words of praise for the emperor, here highlighted in italics:

> After battling the illness for some days, he resigned himself to an imminent demise. To appease God, then he embraced a state of repentance and the imperial power, *grasped unlawfully, he lets it go willingly, doing this well;* he exchanges it for the simplicity of the monastic life, *redeeming his former glory and luxuriousness with voluntary submission and moderation.*[190]

In a manner similar to Psellos' closure of book four, Skylitzes adds an idealised depiction of Isaak as a monk, followed by equally favourable portraits of his wife and children. In particular, the empress Aikaterini comforts Isaak in his deathbed with the promise of 'the joys of Heaven' because of his former renunciation of imperial power. The allusion to the heavenly realm is repeated again a few lines later when Skylitzes praises Isaak's chastity: Isaak choses to endure pain instead of trespassing the rules of morality, since the latter is required 'to attain the kingdom of God'.[191] After these praiseworthy anecdotes, Skylitzes uses the last lines from Attaleiates' account, concerning the interpretation of the miraculous moisture in Isaak's sarcophagus. The *Continuation* does not drastically change the ambiguous conclusion of Attaleiates – Skylitzes even keeps the first-person form of the verbs, making Attaleiates' opinion his own: 'I commend and accept the view of both sides'.[192] The only noteworthy alteration is rhythmical. In response to those theorising that Isaak may have reached heaven due to his repentance, Attaleiates immediately brings contrary opinions, indicating that Isaak did not really repent for his sins.[193] Skylitzes, however, simplifies the debate: one group says that the moisture represents punishment, while the other argues for his salvation through repentance. Even further, while a reader of the *History* has been conditioned by Attaleiates to read the miracle as a proof of divine punishment, Skylitzes, through his account, has carefully

[190] *History* 69/55.7-14; Continuation 108.12-16: Νοσημαχήσας δὲ ἐφ' ἡμέρας τινὰς τὸν μόρον ἐκαραδόκει καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πρὸς ἐξιλέωσιν τοῦ θείου ἀσπάζεται τὴν μετάνοιαν καὶ τὴν βασιλικὴν ἐξουσίαν, *ἧς παρανόμως ἐδράξατο, ἑκοντὶ μεθίησι, τοῦτό γε καλῶς ποιησάμενος*, καὶ τὸν μοναδικὸν ἀσπάζεται βίον, *τὴν πρὶν εὐδοξίαν καὶ τρυφὴν ὑποπτώσει ἑκουσίᾳ καὶ μετριότητι διορθούμενος*; italics are my own.
[191] *Continuation* 109.6-15.
[192] *Continuation* 109.19-110.5, esp. 110.3.4: Ἀμφοτέρων δὲ τὴν γνώμην ἐπαινῶ καὶ ἀποδέχομαι.
[193] *History* 70/56.2-4.

minimised the blame and repeated the evidence of Isaak's repentance and moral strength. In short, one must not be misguided by the formal similarities between the *Continuation* and its main source. Through small but well-aimed additions, Skylitzes managed to produce new meanings from old sources while retaining the historical credentials expressed in the *prooimion*.

From Psellos' strange but perhaps revealing regularities and irregularities in the depiction of Basil II and the following emperors, to Attaleiates' multi-faceted approach to Romanos, and Skylitzes' restructuring of the memory of Emperor Isaak, this chapter debated key aspects of the composition and reception of the eleventh-century narratives. Analysing temporal aspects of the narratives has revealed irregular gaps or twists, sometimes pointing at aspects that have not been recognised in previous scholarship. Primarily, analysing tempo highlights the importance of often-unconscious cultural conventions in eleventh-century Byzantine literature. Our narrators did not write on a blank canvas, but used existing rhythmical patterns and word games which, combined with larger structures, created something new from sublimating the old. This perspective underlines the presence of appropriate frames, marked by different cultural traditions, even in the most intimate and 'original' episodes. In the case of Attaleiates' version of Manzikert, these frames are not very different from other sections of the account: acknowledging this helps to reconcile those sections of the *History* that are more attractive to modern audiences, with these other episodes only occasionally visited by historians with more niche interests. Finally, the *Continuation* reveals an originality that is worthy of renewed scholarly attention. Often considered a mere reworking, Skylitzes reshaped his sources by making apparently insignificant additions. Just as in the oral and more trivial political discourse, then and now, the message is not just about *what* is being told but *how* – and also *when*.

Concluding remarks

My farewell to the three historians

As seen in chapter two, the *Chronographia* has been considered either from the point of view of its objectivised contribution to human knowledge, often measuring it by its distrust of Christian dogma and institutions; or as a piece of appealing rhetoric, mostly understood as a tool for achieving self-promotion. Instead, my research has revealed an account that does not easily fit any of these categories. Psellos indeed enjoyed criticising, even mocking, political actors who were unaware of the 'real' rules governing their lives. However, Psellos does not suggest that the reader embrace some 'amorality', as Anthony Kaldellis put it,[1] but to consider some naturalised codes of behaviour, often tied to Neoplatonic principles such as quality over quantity, the moral high ground over low ground, or the preference for the circle over hyper-complex geometrical forms. This is the scope Psellos used for analysing many key elements from his account – from imperial military campaigns, building policies, the management of honours and titles, to even the own cycle of life and death. That scope also becomes part of the reason why Psellos is so fond of transforming his account into a collection of imperial portraits. Psellos aimed to demonstrate how the character of the man at the apex of the administration was unavoidably 'contagious' to the rest of the surrounding system: any defect in the emperor's character both affected his body and the body of the state. We have seen this throughout the *Chronographia*, and the same approach constantly appears in Psellos' other works.[2]

[1] A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Michael Psellos'* Chronographia (Boston, MA 1999) esp. 44: Psellos, similarly to Machiavelli, produced 'an amoral view of leadership'; also on page 183: 'there is no ideology of Imperial legitimacy in the *Chronographia*. Only the strong have the right to rule, since only they have the ability to do so'.
[2] G. Miles, 'Psellos and his Traditions', in S. Mariev (ed.), *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism* (Boston, MA and Berlin 2017) 79-102; M. Jeffreys, 'Michael Psellos and the Eleventh Century: A Double Helix of Reception', in M.D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow, *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017, 27-28 noted that a more detailed biography of Psellos is also of urgent need.

Psellos was not providing a clean new dogma that neatly replaced the old; his thought was still embedded in the mainstream in one way or another. For instance, Psellos was alluding to the very common notion of greed when explaining why emperors such as Romanos III or Constantine IX did not manage to build geometrically perfect buildings.[3] Instead of trying to unearth a systematic 'Psellian Neoplatonic dogma' deeply hidden behind a layer of the Christian piety, we need to start by looking at Psellos' words from the surface: beyond the sparse deeper references to other episodes and morals conveyed in the text, Psellos presented a relatively clear journey formed by smaller stories and morals. As we have repeatedly seen, the text was not made to convey an encoded, secret message. Instead, it invited the capable reader to move beyond history towards the philosophical and rhetorical treatises that would further explain all, albeit from a better perspective.[4]

This leads to a second general conclusion: Psellos' rhetoric was not all 'about' self-promotion. Our author effectively became a pioneer in the introduction of his own persona in the narration, and his voice and explanation was everywhere throughout the account. However, a substantial element of such self-representation does not promote a uniquely erotic *pathos*, as Papaioannou would put it, but wisdom, even if such wisdom might seem 'mundane' or even epicurean at times.[5] The conclusions of Stratis Papaioannou and Kaldellis about Psellos' *Chronographia* converge in the figure of the unorthodox teacher, a story Psellos would tell about himself – he managed to attract all the attention and glory, but he was ultimately working for the greater cause of philosophical wisdom, as he would put it.[6] Psellos' beliefs did not spring fully formed; his oeuvre does not present a consolidated, systematic whole, the way traditional philosophy has often presented classical philosophers, but rather reveals a

[3] See pages 223-228 above.
[4] My argument follows Miles, 'Psellos and Traditions', 85-86.
[5] On Psellos' epicurean influences: Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 7; see also S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013).
[6] See a wider discussion on Kaldellis' and Papaioannou's respective approaches in pages 42-58 above.

progressive attempt to work out particular contradictions, from within an ideological system that influenced his way of thinking. More can be done in terms of questioning common approaches to the belief systems of a thinker such as Psellos. In fact, the field of Psellos studies would welcome more nuanced approaches that would not attempt to label the philosopher's thoughts as Christian or anti-Christian, focused on revolution or self-promotion, but tried to deconstruct all the usual labels Byzantine scholars have used to categorise this and other authors.

That point leads us to our second account, the *History* of Attaleiates. As discussed in chapter two, a substantial portion of the modern research has focused on selecting which material of the *History* counted as Attaleiates' 'true thoughts', rescuing a 'serious' thinker *à la Psellos* from a pool of convenient rhetorical praises to Botaneiates and superfluous allusions to omens and prophecies. My approach throughout the thesis, closer to the earlier research carried out by Alexander Kazhdan, Lia Raffaella Cresci, Carlotta Amande, or Martin Hinterberger, emphasises the inner consistency of the account.[7] Following Inmaculada Pérez Martín's research, it is now clear that Attaleiates did not write his account from cover to cover without interruption.[8] However, instead of dividing the text into a 'sincere' historical account and lip service to Botaneiates, it becomes apparent that the *enkomia* to Botaneiates supported the historical narrative as promoted by Attaleiates. He elaborated on an account whose earlier, briefer stories reminded the reader of the most dramatic sections, which are positioned at the end; the same morals and the rhythm in which characters engage with these principles repeat throughout the account. It all leads to the reign of Botaneiates, presented as the ultimate fulfilment of all the preceding stories: he was able to act according to the naturalised law,

[7] See pages 58-64 above.
[8] I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates: Historia* (Madrid 2002) xli-xliv.

released the wealth greedily treasured by his predecessors, and imposed fair laws binding his will to the principles of piety and self-restraint. God, in return, grants prosperity to his people.

Attaleiates' final chapters mostly constitute a happy ending, written in what we now see as the darkest hour of eleventh-century Byzantium. Turkish bands camped on the Asiatic shores of the Bosporos, Pechenegs and Normans ravaged the Western provinces. Inner politics did not look better: Botaneiates exhausted the public Treasury in his aim to buy loyalties, but would be ousted from the throne three years after his ascension. In my view, the main problem modern scholars have had when reading Attaleiates' account is understanding the author's joyful reception of Botaneiates. Kazhdan had no problem in adducing Attaleiates' despair as the main cause for his words, to which scholars such as Dimitris Krallis reacted with incredulity – it could not be that such an intelligent man saw the saviour of the empire in that brutal, old soldier.[9]

I argue instead for a return to Kazhdan's line of thought, albeit with some substantial modifications. As Kaldellis recently argued, there was no clear way out from the eleventh-century crisis: some sort of crisis was inevitable, given the circumstances, in an empire such as Byzantium.[10] Thus, I wonder why modern researchers try to present the accounts of Psellos and Attaleiates as if they were proposing a number of 'secular' solutions to the crisis (for instance, using the income to build armies instead of churches) when a 'secular' way out of the crisis seems unlikely even in the eyes of modern researchers.[11] Attaleiates' situation was one of tragic ἀπορία, both in terms of material scarcity (note his depiction of famine and the rise in mortality

[9] D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AR 2012), esp. xxxiv and 168.
[10] A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, NY and Oxford 2017) 271.
[11] Krallis, *Imperial Decline*, 104-105 and 279; see also Kaldellis, *The Argument*, 68, 78, and 182, for a similar position concerning Psellos.

rates from within the capital) and the lack of a clear path.[12] Attaleiates offered a number of solutions in this *History* although these may not coincide with the political diagnoses of either some of his modern readers, nor with some of his contemporaries. Using the concepts coined by Alan Palmer, I argue that Attaleiates crafted a narrative aiming to transition from the 'source domain', namely a variety of opinions on the current crisis, to the 'target domain' – a 'storyworld' in which crises had clear causes and solutions.[13] Instead of aiming for further militarisation, as recent scholarship often argued, Attaleiates' account encourages his peers, and especially the emperor, to renew their loyalty to the common cause, that being the wealth of the Romans and the naturalised *taxis*.[14] Such is the pervasiveness of what Bourdieu called *habitus*: Attaleiates promoted a way to exorcise problems by renewing the people's loyalty to the regime, a system that, he believed, had worked well for centuries.[15]

While Attaleiates occasionally unmasks the hypocrisy of ecclesiastics in preaching for sacrifice and piety while acting out of selfishness, and even accused the Romans of acting more immorally than his pagan predecessors and even some barbarians, his understanding of the natural morals did not explicitly diverge from his understanding of Christianity – why would it? Christian values and symbols were part of the cosmic order that had worked until recently. As Krallis, noted, Attaleiates used Polybius as a source to construct his own narrative: as

[12] Michael Attaleiates, *History* 198/152.27-153.7 explicitly presented the situation as particularly troublesome; in 211-213/162.23-164.6 Attaleiates noted, together with the birth of a deformed baby and ominous signals, the arrival of multitudes from the eastern provinces; because of Emperor Michael's greed, these people were not properly fed and prepared for winter, which led to the accumulation of corpses in the streets.

[13] A. Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln, NE 2004) 34; on the concept 'storyworld', see D. Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln, NE 2002) esp. 55; see also L. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (Austin, TX 2015) 94-100 in relation to epideictic rhetoric:

> Epideictic rhetoric is the social order's rejuvenating bath. It instantiates a moment of communion, in which a community, or a microcommunity, presents itself with a show of its own unity …. [The *enkomion*] is not reducible to cant or flattery; it performs a social role. It delineates images and beliefs common to the group; it defines and justifies accepted values; and sometimes it grants currency to new values.

[14] I agree with Krallis when he argues that the *History* is trying, through his account, to bind people from different social groups around a common cause: D. Krallis, 'Urbane Warriors: Smoothing out Tensions between Soldiers and Civilians in Attaleiates' Encomium to Emperor Nikephoros Botaneiates', in M.D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow (eds.), *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (Oxford 2017) 154-168.

[15] P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power' (trans. L.J.D. Wacquant), *Sociological Theory* 7 (1989) 14-25.

Polybius explained the rise of Rome, Attaleiates testified to the empire's recent decline. However, Attaleiates also used Flavius Josephus' account of the first Judeo-Roman War rebellion for his account: a story of how the chosen people lost divine favour because of the impiety of their leaders.[16] Furthermore, Attaleiates' multiple references to Job direct the audience to the famous story of divine punishment and redemption. As in the case of Job, the reasons for divine punishment of the Romans are unclear, but the obligation to live in fear of the Lord, to respect of the law and to choose morality over private pleasure, remained the only solution. Attaleiates' role in the story, not very different from that of Psellos in the *Chronographia*, is that of the wise advisor, who clarifies the situation by making the unspecific specific, detecting clear causes and signs of immorality, weakness and divine disapproval.[17] By harshly criticising the Romans for their fallen state, Attaleiates prepared the ground for the later encomiastic sections of the *History*, there showing who was the right ruler and what was the right thing to do: to obey the ruler, the patron, and the law.

Attaleiates also played his part in the *taxis* by acting loyally to his patron, praising his virtues and keeping silence over his defects.[18] However, although Attaleiates deployed a 'good faith' approach to Botaneiates as the saviour of the empire, hoping that his piety and good sense would suffice to save the empire, in stating clearly what occurred to Botaneiates' predecessors, he is reminding to the new ruler what could happen if he strayed away from the proper path. To sum up, although I agree with Kazhdan's reading of the *History* as a solid narrative leading to the praise of Nikephoros III Botaneiates, unlike him, I do not find Attaleiates' approach

[16] T. Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London 1983); N. Ben Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* (Madison, WI 1995).

[17] Psellos and Attaleiates both aspired to become charismatic voices that convinced the audience of the validity of their predicament, in the line of Peter Brown's depiction of the charismatic, Late Antique holy man: P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80-101, esp. 97-99.

[18] For instance, Attaleiates kept silence over the controversial marriage of Botaneiates with Maria of Alania while his previous wife was still alive: A. Laiou, 'Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes', *DOP* 46 (1992) 174.

'naïve'. Attaleiates promoted good faith and high values to protect the empire from the rise of chaotic forces threating to devour the Byzantine *taxis*, which is what Attaleiates valued most highly.[19]

The historical accounts by John Skylitzes pose particular challenges for reaching specific conclusions. Scholars such as Jonathan Shepard or Angeliki Laiou have made it clear that concrete sources were used for lengthy passages of the eleventh-century narration in the *Synopsis*;[20] not to speak of the massive use of the *History*, together with the *Chronographia* and other sources, for the *Continuation*. When analysing the political thought conveyed in both accounts, one thus needs to recognise not only the agendas pursued by Skylitzes' sources, but of the new meaning these edited accounts had once they were included in their new context. Both the intended audience and the audience's expectations change; thus, for instance, Kekaumenos' 'political manifesto' against the passivity of Isaak Komnenos during the *coup* becomes a praiseworthy account of Isaak's accession to power, less accusatory than the accounts of Psellos and Attaleiates.[21] The same occurs in the new readings of the *Continuation*: Skylitzes did far more than edit Attaleiates' account. By removing inflammatory digressions and encomiastic praises to Botaneiates, while adding other sorts of 'more impartial' data, Skylitzes formed an apparently more nuanced and credible account – a stupendous vehicle of his subtle Komnenian propaganda.

[19] Attaleiates made his fears explicit in his speech comparing the ancient and contemporary Romans, arguing that the latter used the imperative of the 'common good' as a sufficient reason for corrupting the system in the pursuit of their own benefit: see note 160 in chapter 4; a modern counterpart to Attaleiates' fear of crisis-led change is Milton Friedman's famous statement 'only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change …. the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable': M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, IL 2002 [1962]) xiv; see also The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends* (London and South Pasadena, CA 2015 [2014]) 24: 'the discourse of crisis intervenes as a political method for managing populations … The rhetoric of change is used to dismantle every custom, to break all ties, to unsettle every certainty, to discourage every solidarity, to maintain a chronic existential insecurity'.

[20] See pages 68-70 above.

[21] See page 142 above.

A second general conclusion invites caution against validating the *Synopsis* and its *Continuation* as more trustworthy materials than the *History* and the *Chronographia*. As Ruth Macrides argued over two decades ago, historians were (and still are) uncomfortable or unsure about what to do when analysing supposedly subjective accounts such as those of Psellos and Attaleiates.[22] But should we give more credit to Skylitzes *just because* he seems detached from his materials? Like Macrides, I would say 'no': not only does Skylitzes work over sources that were once read as more subjective, such as Kekaumenos' account, but also his account is inevitably embedded in all sorts of narrative conventions. Thus, Skylitzes explains imperial victory and defeat based on the ideal masculinity of the leading characters, the imagined space in which scenes are situated, or the pre-established rules of the narrative rhythm. Even if Skylitzes' stated intentions of ruling out partiality to specific characters were sincere, he cannot avoid falling into the literary conventions that systematise history in traditional episodes of virtue and vice.

(Byzantine) political ideology: an afterword

In his article-long review of *TBR*, John Haldon noted that the way a state is created and sustained is one thing, but the way that it is justified by the different political actors is another.[23] While some historians might completely forget about the former, building their understanding of an individual's ideology 'floating on the air', detached from the material conditions, other scholars are so sure of the validity of their understanding of power relations that they end up transposing their views onto the authors. This thesis has demonstrated how intricate the relation between the two poles can be. Psellos laughed at apparently sanctimonious characters but preached belief in Neoplatonic and Christian principles and morals; Attaleiates saw his cosmic

[22] R. Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in C.N. Constantinides, N.M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys, and A.D. Angelou (eds.), *Philellen: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996) 208.
[23] J. Haldon, 'Res Publica Byzantina? State Formation and Issues of Identity in Medieval East Rome', *BMGS* 40.1 (2016) 9-11.

order burning out and felt compelled to believe even further in his ancestors' beliefs; Skylitzes' notion of impartiality simply shifted blame from sober, austere men to eunuchs and drunkards.

As supposed inhabitants of a 'post-ideological' world, scholars sometimes approach Byzantine authors either as naïve vehicles of past ideologies, or as 'post-ideological pioneers', precursors of humanism, *Renaissance*, or even cynical self-promotion. But there is no way out of ideology. As a hunter learns new tricks to hunt rabbits in the forest, technology has offered handy tricks to enhance the survival of larger human communities. However, anyone who has had a rabbit as a pet, not to speak of a cat or a dog, has been aware of the unpredictability of the animal, its sudden changes of humour and apparently erratic behaviours. It would be misguided for the hunter to believe that she or he has unlocked the complex psyche of the rabbit – she or he simply found a way to increase the chances for a rabbit to fall into a particular spot in the forest at a certain time. Similarly, as life sciences have proven effective in addressing urgent and massive human problems with increasing accuracy, wider ethical and political questions are wide open for debate with tools other than neurological scans and statistical data – there humanities, from philosophy and sociology to narrative studies, have a task to fulfil as collaborators of the former.

My research circumscribed a small number of sources, narrowly localised around the elite circles of mid-eleventh century Constantinople; thus, any conclusion extracted from this essay should be put to test with materials from other literary genres and contexts. What can this particularly localised narrative study say about the wider topic of eleventh-century Byzantine political ideology? In a context in which the already-explored mainstream historical sources are being rediscovered as carriers of valuable information in terms of 'alternative' ideology to supplement the 'more official' panegyrics and hagiographies, I would like to stress a number of issues.

First, the four accounts, and particularly those of Psellos and Attaleiates, constitute exceptional approaches to contemporary politics, but their thoughts on matters such as the political regime, ethics, or the role of the divine, do not fall very far from other contemporary texts. They indeed claimed to fight superstition, in the same way as thinkers from other epochs built their own statements by proving the falsity of others' beliefs. However, despite the wide knowledge of our authors, their trust in naturalised, corporeal conceptions of the state; the exceptional position of the ruler to inspire changes throughout the whole empire, or the expectation of some sort of superhuman punishment to reified moral principles, all seem solidly implanted in their way of thinking.

Second, though acknowledging the existence of ancient or medieval scepticism, or even 'atheism', one should be wary of the compatibility of the aforementioned political and ethical beliefs with the ample doses of knowledge treasured by our authors. These notions were conceived as intuitive, accurate-enough axiomatic principles to work with. Modern research from the 'post-ideological' era has tried to dismiss some of these beliefs as, in essence, impositions from the court and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the meantime, a substantial number of supposedly non-religious CEOs employ mainstream syntheses of Christian, Buddhist or Taoist beliefs to carry out their routines; the British establishment itself has been studied in terms of its religious-looking beliefs, and there is a clear religious background to certain modern ways of addressing the environmental crisis.[24] Approached from this perspective, Byzantine encomiastic discourses of the 'eternal victory' of the rulers do not fall

[24] P. Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoísmo: aportaciones a la crítica de la cinética política*, trans. A.M. de la Fuente (Barcelona 2001 [Frankfurt am Main 1989]); O. Jones, *The Establishment, and How They Get Away with It* (London 2015) analyses mainstream narratives of legitimisation among contemporary British social elites; a critical approach to modern uses of mindfulness and their relation with economic and religious phenomena: R.E. Purser, D. Forbes, and A. Burke (eds.), *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social Engagement* (New York, NY 2016); on the belief systems of Contemporary American elite members: see also B. Ehrenreich, *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer* (London 2018).

very far from the 'false permanent revolution' that Sloterdijk detected at the core of our modern beliefs in social progress.[25]

The era of secularism seems further away than ever, which generates a number of tensions with ongoing debates on secularism and multiculturalism. The more Byzantine scholars seem to dismiss Byzantine political beliefs as dogmatic nonsense contrasted to some reified 'progressive' or 'secularist' values, the more they seem to be responding to contemporary ideological uncertainties. Therefore, this essay could potentially contribute to modern debates on political ideology by first inviting us to deconstruct our own modern predicaments by forming new dialogues with the (Byzantine) past. As said at the beginning of this thesis, one must be conscious of how power relations mediate current discourses and ideologies, but we must also remain cautious in labelling something as 'ideological' in opposition to 'reality'. As our research on the 'impartial' Skylitzes showed, after removing *enkomia* and dramatic digressions, one can still find pervasive discourses on masculinity and reified values embedded in causal explanations – you cannot escape ideology, especially, as Bourdieu has taught us, the ideology that you have internalised.[26] Even further, the very human tendency to search for meaning throughout an ambiguous reality or, to cite Jean Bauillard, 'the desert of the real', leads us to escape one form of ideology by falling into a new one.[27]

[25] Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoísmo*, 12; M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge 1986).
[26] See especially Bourdieu, 'Social Space', 14-25; P. Bourdieu, *An Invitation to Reflective Sociology* (Chicago, IL 1992).
[27] J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S.F. Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI 1994 [1981]) 1-3.

Appendices

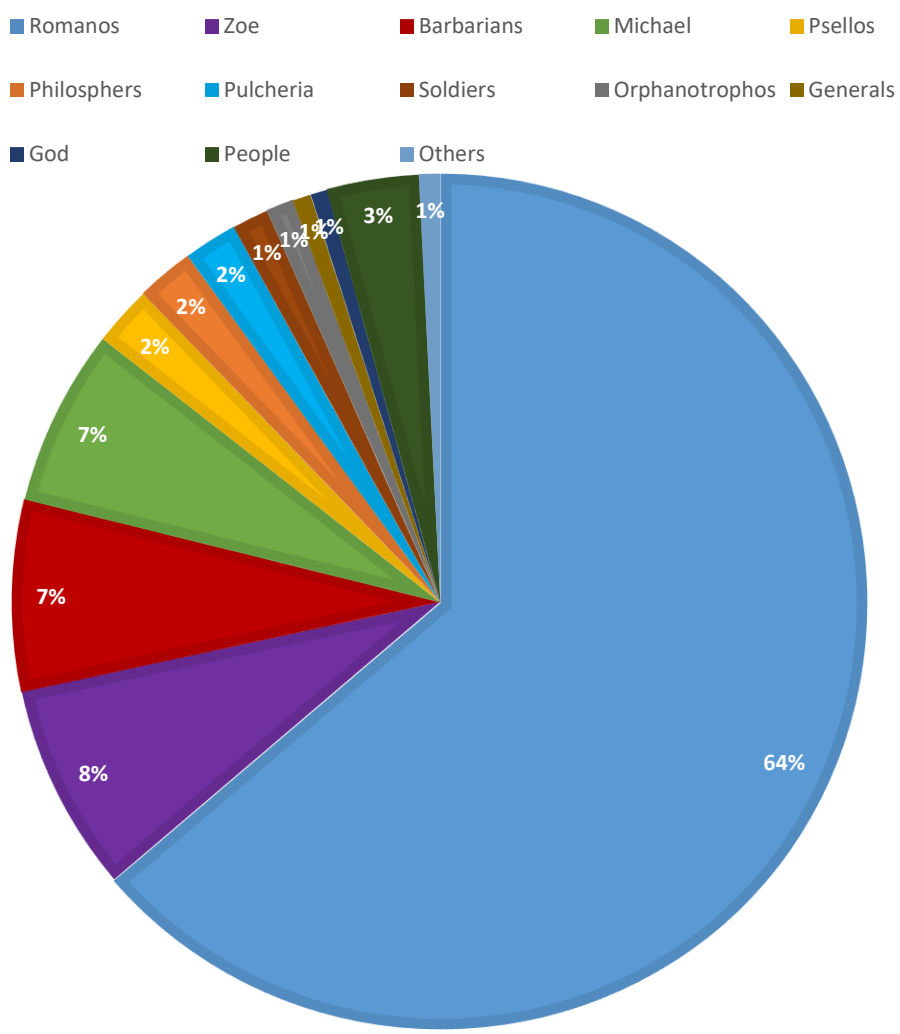
1. Psellos' book 3 (on Romanos III) (4,782 words according to the Thessaurus Linguae Graecae)

Wider episodes	Section	Word count	Prominent characters, in order of apparition
INTRODUCTION	1	151	Romanos 74; Psellos 77
	2	139	Romanos
PHILOSOPHY	3	104	Philosophers
	4	112	Romanos
ROMANOS AND ZOE	5	184	Romanos 112; Zoe 30; Romanos 42
	6	165	Romanos 65; Zoe 51; Others-Pulcheria 24; Romanos 25
CAMPAIGN	7	179	Romanos 143; Generals 20; Romanos 16
	8	202	Romanos 50; Barbarians 68; Romanos 84
	9	269	Barbarians 144; soldiers 66; Romanos 28; God 31
	10	227	Barbarians 133; Romanos 94
	11	147	Romanos 120; Generals 13; Romanos 14
CHANGE IN ROMANOS	12	164	Romanos
	13	108	Romanos
CHURCH	14	246	Romanos-church
	15	330	Romanos (implicit in Psellos' digression)
	16	164	Romanos
ZOE'S AFFAIR	17	98	Romanos 62; Zoe 36
	18	189	Title and introduction 25; Orphanotrophos 50; Michael 66; Romanos 9; Zoe 39
	19	275	Zoe 42; Michael 38; Zoe 26; Michael 48; Zoe 18; Michael 27; courtiers 47; Michael 13; Zoe 16
	20	137	Zoe 77; eunuch 40; Zoe 20
	21	200	Romanos
	22	150	Michael 75; Romanos 22; Michael 53
	23	194	Romanos 18; Psellos 26; Romanos 49; Psellos 5; Romanos 11; Pulcheria-others 73; Romance (Zoe and Michael) 12
DISEASE AND DEATH	24	180	Romanos
	25	98	Romanos
	26	370	Romanos 181; assistants 46; Romanos 32; someone 23; people 9; Zoe 21; Romanos 58

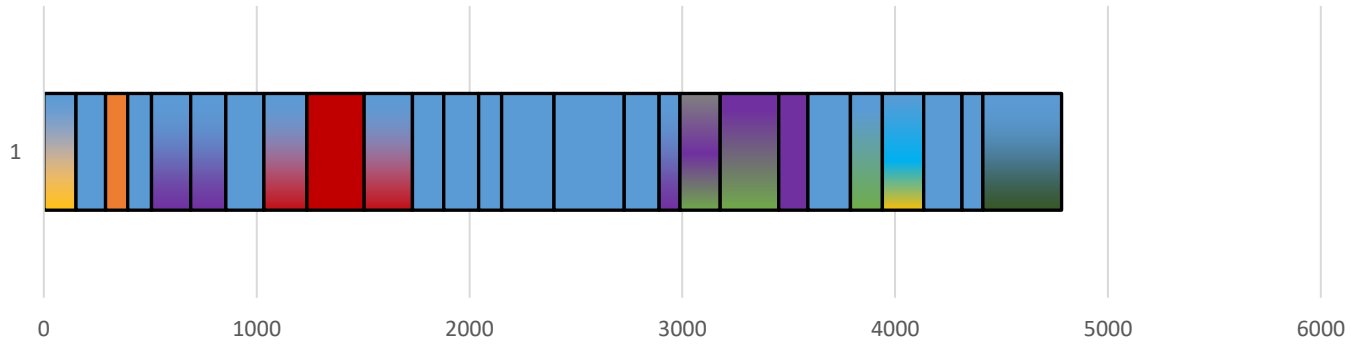
2. Characters, ordered by number of words:

Romanos	3050
Zoe	376
Barbarians	345
Michael	320
Psellos	108
Philosophers	104
Pulcheria	97
Soldiers	66
Orphanotrophos	50
Generals	33
God	31
Other people	165
Others	37

3. Character prominence in the *Chronographia*, book three

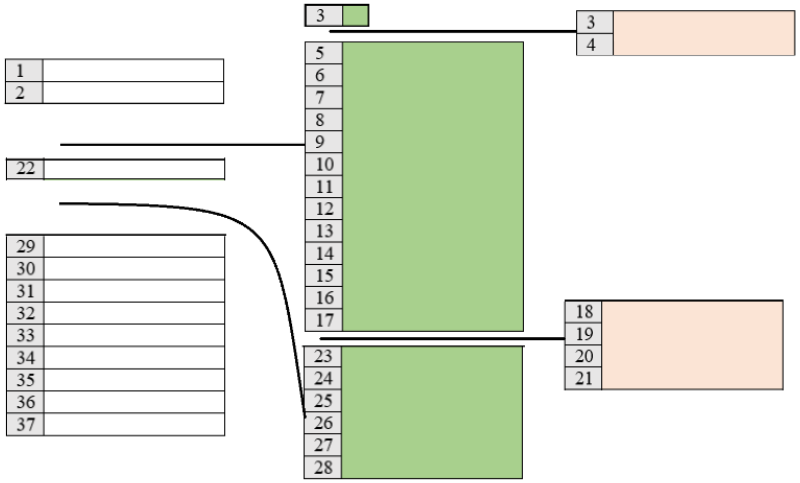


4. Book three, divided in its conventional sections, representing the prominence of different characters in each one of them by colours, in correspondence with the previous graph



5. Psellos' book one summarised, following the paragraph division from the manuscript, and highlighting the insertions theorised in section 6.2.1.

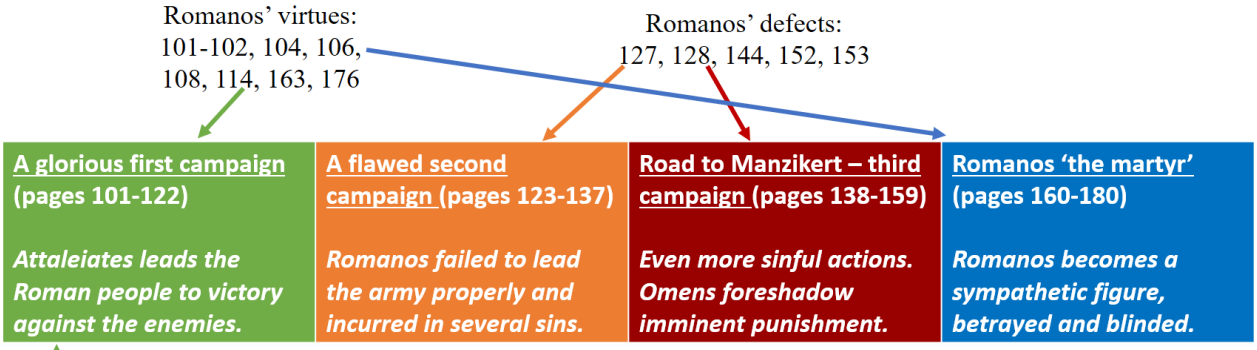
1	Tzimiskes' death, the reign of Basil and Constantine begins	
2	Comparing Basil and Constantine: the latter steps back	
3	Basil has to share power with the *parakoimomenos*	Rebellion / Parakoimomenos
4	Basil's fame as irascible. The rebellions	
5	Skleros rebelled, a promising general, but Phokas is better	The story of the rebellion (whose cause was already introduced at the beginning of section three).
6	Phokas forced to swear allegiance	
7	Phokas is stronger than Skleros, an expert general	
8	Single combat: Skleros is humiliated	
9	War is over, Skleros escapes to Assyria, where is captured	
10	Phokas returns, but is neglected, so he rebels too	
11	Skleros escapes and returns	
12	Skleros joins Phokas, the rebellion prospers	
13	Basil, aware of the Romans' disloyalty, trusts in foreigners	
14	Basil was leading the war, learning the office	
15	Battle: Phokas ignores the bad omens and charges	
16	Basil awaits him, but Phokas falls: debating possible causes	
17	The rebel army breaks apart	
18	Then Basil's character changed: overly suspicious, irritable	Second section of the story on the *parakoimomenos*: his fall.
19	Basil exiles the *parakoimomenos* despite his good service	
20	Basil even destroys all his legacy, including his monastery	
21	The *parakeimomenos* is filled with despair and dies	
22	Basil, perceiving the empire's problems, became austere	
23	He wants to fight barbarians, but first he finishes Skleros	The 'second rebellion', which is simply the end of the long narrative on the rebellions of Phokas and Skleros.
24	Skleros uses guerrilla tactics successfully	
25	The rebellion resisted for years due to the rebels' unity	
26	Basil despaired and forged a pact with Skleros	
27	They meet, but Skleros removes the purple sandals first	
28	They chat, and Skleros gives terrible advice to Basil	
29	Basil ruled by terror and intuition. Philosophy then	
30	Won over barbarians and *dynatoi*, ruled with vulgar people	
31	Immense revenues, he stores all of it	
32	Excellent discipline and devotion to the military needs	
33	Basil's military expertise and practices	
34	Two-folded: villain at war and emperor at peace	
35	Outer appearance	
36	Height, speech, beard	
37	His reign was exceedingly long	



6. A scheme on the four depictions of Romanos IV in the *History*

Storytelling and political discourse: Attaleiates and Romanos IV

Kazhdan analysed Attaleiates' depiction of Romanos by grouping the emperor's virtues and defects (Kazhdan 1984, 35-36)



Pérez Martín pointed out the '*intellectual inconsistency*' of Attaleiates: the author declared that men are responsible of their own disgrace or fortune [86-87] but then sides with *the more traditional belief*: that victories and defeats depend of the man in charge, therefore everything related to men is in God's hands. [108] (Pérez Martín 2002, xvii-xviii).

7. The reign of Isaak I Komnenos as described in Michael Attaleiates' *History*.

1. ARRIVAL (210)	1.1. Accession to the throne (105)	1.1.1. Isaak arrives to the City and the palace	33
		1.1.2. Coronation by the patriarch	28
		1.1.3. Isaak's martial reputation, coin image	44
	1.2. Gifts and honours (105)	1.2.1. He bestowed honours to many	26
		1.2.2. Honouring the patriarch and his family	25
		1.2.3. Concedes ample rights to H. Sophia	54
2. INTERNAL REFORMS (302)	2.1. Fiscal measures (107)	2.1.1. He recognised the fiscal needs	48
		2.1.2. So he cut back stipends	24
		2.1.3. Obtain lands, deprive individuals	35
	2.2. Monastic affairs (175)	2.2.1. Isaak also assailed rich monasteries	37
		2.2.2. Digression: the reforms were good	138
	2.3. Closure: that was it		20
3. PATRIARCH (825)	3.1. Keroularios' insolence		71
	3.2. The plot to exile him (179)	3.2.1. The emperor resolves to act	32
		3.2.2. The Patriarch was in the festival,	45
		3.2.3. the evil emperor was with his associates;	17
		3.2.4. he sent a priest to distract the patriarch	26
		3.2.5. Keroularios is trapped & sent to exile	38
		3.2.6. Summary: exile of patriarch and his relatives. Isaak's excuses.	21
	3.3. Keroularios' reaction (158)	3.3.1. Summary: he did accept his situation	41
		3.3.2. His pain: exiled, powerless, like Job	42
		3.3.3. But he thanked God nevertheless	75
	3.4. Emperor's schemes (176)	3.4.1. Isaak feels remorse secretly	23
		3.4.2. so he decides to accuse him falsely	21
		3.4.3. Some flatterers collaborate	27
		3.4.4. Isaak sends bishops to negotiate	36
		3.4.5. But they find an unmovable patriarch	34
		3.4.6. Ashamed, defeated bishops return to Isaak	35
	3.5. Conclusion (181)	3.5.1. Isaak, troubled, looks for alternatives	15
		3.5.2. But Keroularios dies, as prophesised	75
		3.5.3. A repented Isaak brings his body back	45
		3.5.4. Keroularios' miracle & sainthood	46
	3.6. A new patriarch (60)	3.6.1. Leichoudes' good reputation	36
		3.6.2. As a patriarch, he is generous	24
4. CAMPAIGN (334)	4.1. Victory at war (173)	4.1.1. Isaak reacts to the barbarian attack	31
		4.1.2. Victory over Sauromatai and Skythians	59
		4.1.3. Selte's resistance and ultimate defeat	67
		4.1.4. Closure: Isaak leaves garrisons	16
	4.2. Disasters – omens (161)	4.2.1. Lobitzo: torrential rain and windstorm	78
		4.2.2. Swollen river, more Roman deaths	20
		4.2.3. Ominous falling trunk	63
5. END (365)	5.1. Return to normal (76)	5.1.1. Back to the city – new rebellion?	33
		5.1.2. No rebellion: Isaak goes for hunting	43
	5.2. Illness and last moves (115)	5.2.1. Isaak falls ill by a lighting	27
		5.2.2. Accepts his death, becomes a monk	26
		5.2.3. Chooses a successor: Constantine X	32
		5.2.4. End of his life: years as ruler and as monk	30
	5.3. Moisture (174)	5.3.1. Some read it as proving God's punishment	72
		5.3.2. Others says it shows Isaak's repentance	21
		5.3.3. but some argue he did not repent	20
		5.3.4. Others say it marked his sanctity	34
TOTAL: 2036		5.3.5. I think both points are good	27

8. Overall comparison between the *History* and the *Continuation*. Skylitzes' additional material can be seen at the end of the account (5.2b and 5.3b).

Also, note the different emphasis in the points 3.1 and 3.6 in comparison to the remaining sections of point 3: Skylitzes highlights Keroularios' guilt, and the good news of a new patriarch, over the story of Keroularios' exile.

Points 3.2 to 3.5 constitute 84% of point 3, and 34% of Isaak's account in the *History*; meanwhile, the same section occupies 41% of point 3 in the *Synopsis*, a mere 10% of that account.

Attaleiates - *History*		**Skylitzes - *Continuation***	
1. ARRIVAL (210)	1.1. Accession to the throne (105)	1.1. Accession to the throne (40)	1. ARRIVAL (178)
	1.2. Gifts and honours (105)	1.2. Gifts and honours (138)	
2. INTERNAL REFORMS (302)	2.1. Fiscal measures (107)	2.1. Fiscal measures (84)	2. INTERNAL REFORMS (200)
	2.2. Monastic affairs (175)	2.2. Monastic affairs (102)	
	2.3. Closure: that was it (20)	2.3. Closure: that was it (14)	
3. PATRIARCH (825)	**3.1. Keroularios' insolence (71)**	**3.1. Keroularios' insolence (111)**	3. PATRIARCH (504)
	3.2. The plot to exile him (179)	3.2. The plot to exile him (93)	
	3.3. Keroularios' reaction (158)	3.3. Keroularios' reaction (NONEXISTENT)	
	3.4. Emperor's schemes (176)	3.4. Emperor's schemes (47)	
	3.5. Conclusion (181)	3.5. Conclusion (67)	
	3.6. A new patriarch (60)	**3.6. A new patriarch (186)**	
4. CAMPAIGN (334)	4.1. Victory at war (173)	4.1. Victory at war (133)	4. CAMPAIGN (331)
	4.2. Disasters – omens (161)	4.2. Disasters – omens (198)	
5. END (365)	5.1. Return to normal (76)	5.1. Return to normal (35)	5. END (802)
	5.2. Illness and last moves (115)	5.2. Illness and last moves (179)	
		5.2b. Added material: praise to Isaak and Aikaterine (208)	
	5.3. Moisture (174)	5.3. Moisture (121)	
TOTAL: 2036		**5.3b. New material: Praise and sayings of Aikaterine and Isaak (259)**	**TOTAL: 2015**

9. Detail of the first section of Isaak's account in the *History* and the *Continuation*. Skylitzes' lesser emphasis on the role of the patriarch becomes apparent when compared with the source he is copying almost *verbatim*. Isaak's coronation by Keroularios is erased altogether, and the later sections mentioning the patriarch and Hagia Sophia share now prominence with the empress and Kekaumenos. All in all, the presence of Keroularios, his family and 'his church' occupies 107 words in the *History*, about 50% of point 1. In the *Continuation*, it occupies 75 words, a bit more than 40%.

Attaleiates' *History*

1. ARRIVAL (210)	1.1. Accession to the throne (105)	1.1.1. Isaak arrives to the City and the palace	33
		1.1.2. Coronation by the patriarch	**28**
		1.1.3. Isaak's martial reputation, coin image	44
	1.2. Gifts and honours (105)	1.2.1. He bestowed honours to many	26
		1.2.2. Honouring the patriarch and his family	**25**
		1.2.3. Concedes ample rights to H. Sophia	**54**

Skylitzes' *Continuation*

1. ARRIVAL (178)	1.1. Accession to the throne (40)	1.1.1. Isaak arrives to the City and the palace	11
		~~**1.1.2. Coronation by the patriarch**~~	
		1.1.3. Isaak's martial reputation, coin image	29
	1.2. Gifts and honours (138)	1.2.1. He bestowed honours to many	33
		1.2.2. Honouring the patriarch and his family	**23**
		1.2.3. Concedes ample rights to H. Sophia	**52**
		1.2.3b. Brings Aikaterine and honours her	12
		1.2.3c. Honours Katakalon Kekaumenos	18

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